

Semi-Monthly

Novels Series,

No.

BEADLE'S

280.

DIME NOVELS



BORDER VENGEANCE.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK

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OR,

THE NIGHT-HAWK'S DAUGHTER.

A TALE OF THE TERRITORIES.

BY W. J. HAMILTON,

Author of the following Dime Novels.

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NEW YORK:

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,

98 WILLIAM STREET.

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(No. 280.)

BORDER VENGEANCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LIGHTNING-BOLT.

THE scene opens in the midst of a wooded country to the north-west of the great lake chain.

A young man, admirably mounted, and dressed in a green hunting suit, was riding slowly through a forest road, upon which great trees had fallen, actually blocking up the path. The road itself was indented by many hoof-marks, but not a single wagon-track, showing that the country was as yet in the hands of the borderers, who, in most cases, had neglected to remove the fallen trees, preferring to leap their horses over them to the trouble of using the axe.

The young horseman had a frank, good-humored, though not exactly handsome face, was long of limb and "well set up," and, taken all together, was a person who could have held his own well in any contest. He carried a short rifle slung at his back, pistols in the holsters, and a bunch in his left side, beneath the coat, showed where a more dangerous weapon lay concealed—the revolver.

He rode on at a slow trot, glancing now and then through the thick leaves overhead, where the clouds were already gathering, betokening the coming storm. Noticing this, he touched his horse to hasten his pace, and had just leaped a fallen tree, when two horsemen rounded a point of woods, and approached him. They were men of the border stamp, hard-featured, sinewy fellows of that peculiar class at whose appearance a stranger on a lonely road instinctively lays his hand upon a weapon. As they came on they separated and attempted to pass one on each side, but the young horseman was up to that trick, and deliberately reined his horse to the right-hand side of the road, so that no one could pass on that

side. The two horsemen pulled up and looked at him threateningly.

"We are the border breed, stranger," said the one on the left hand, "and we don't 'low no new man to have his own way *always*."

"Ride on about your business, men," replied the young horseman, in a sharp, quick tone. "It will be better for you to do so."

"You crow pretty loud, stranger," replied the man, sullenly, at the same time putting his hand to his breast-pocket.

"Put down your hand!" cried the horseman, suddenly drawing and cocking a revolver. "Do it at once, both of you, or you are dead men!"

Facing both men he could have shot them down before it would have been possible for either to draw a weapon.

"Pshaw, stranger," whined the spokesman, "can't you take a joke? We was only fooling with you."

"Then ride on about your business, and leave me to attend to mine. I have no quarrel with you, and you would make little beyond my horse and arms, by trying to rob me."

"You ain't very complimentary to us, stranger," said the man. "I didn't mean no harm, I am sure. Why, what do you take us for?"

"For a couple of precious villains, who dare not carry out their plan of robbery. Now listen to me. You see the road straight before you for a quarter of a mile. Put your hands above your heads and ride on, without turning your heads."

It was an awkward position, and they chafed under it, but the eye of the horseman warned them that he meant business, and they rode away with their hands in the required position, until satisfied that they were out of pistol range, when one of them reached for his rifle. In doing so, he saw that the young man had put back the revolver, and sat coolly in the saddle, with his "Henry" rifle at the full cock, evidently both ready and willing to fire at them if they dared to turn.

"Drop it, Bill," said the border-man to his companion.

"He's got one of them cussed repeating rifles, and he's on the shoot or I don't know any thing about a man's eye. But, thunder and lightning! How *kin* we let such a hoss as that git away from us? He's worth a thousand dollars in Kansas City."

"Never you mind, Jake," said the other. "The young whelp can't get out of the kentry, and I've marked him down. I'll have him, if I have to foller him to Omaha, the fighting-chicken! No man ever cowed Bill Brace down *that* way before, and if he don't get a blue pill before a week has passed over his head, then spit in my face and call me a liar, that's all. The Hawks will have him, sure."

As he said this the two men, putting their horses to their speed, hurried on; and, seeing that he had nothing more to dread from them, the young man re-slung his rifle, turned his horse's head and went on his way. His horse had not taken a dozen leaps, however, when he started suddenly aside as a white apparition flitted through the bushes by the way-side and was gone.

"Halt, there!" cried the horseman. "Halt, or I fire."

No answer was returned, and he went on his way musingly. He was satisfied that the figure he had seen was a woman's form, but, what was she doing in this wild place? and where had she gone? Just then the storm which had been rapidly culminating, burst upon him in wild fury. The murky face of the heavens was lighted up by repeated flashes of lightning, the crash of thunder was absolutely fearful, and it required the utmost effort of his skill to restrain his frantic horse. Louder and louder peals of thunder followed; then a great dry pine, not a hundred yards away, was riven from crest to base by a lightning-bolt, and burst into sudden flame, which ran up the dry tree to its very top, lighting up the scene. And there, at the base of the tree, lay the white figure which he had seen, motionless as death! He was now engaged in a frantic struggle with his horse, for the noble beast, driven half mad by the crashing of the thunder and the lurid gleam of the lightning, could hardly be restrained, and only the most consummate horsemanship enabled the young man to keep his seat.

After a struggle of five minutes' duration, he succeeded in

calming the frantic horse, and in forcing him nearer the white object upon the ground beneath the tree. He was now near enough to see that it was a woman lying senseless on the sod, and that she had fallen by some sudden and terrible blow, probably by the shock which had riven the pine asunder, and set it in a blaze.

Without thinking longer of keeping the horse, he sprung from the saddle and ran to the side of the fallen woman, and uttered a low cry of surprise as his eyes fell upon her. It was a girlish figure, clad in a simple white muslin dress, evidently one of the poorer class of people, but there was something unearthly in her beauty as she lay there at his feet. The shock had left her pale as death, and every drop of blood seemed to have receded from her face. Her head was crowned by short clustering ringlets of brown hair, and her long lashes fell upon her marble cheek, as she lay with closed eyes—as if asleep—her head pillowed on her rounded arm. A lovely creature; the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen!

There was no time to hesitate, for fragments were falling all about them from the burning pine. Lifting the light form in his arms, he carried her rapidly down the road to a more open space, and, to his surprise, was followed by his horse. The lower order of animals instinctively cling to man in moments of terror, and the noble steed was too thoroughly frightened to wish to fly. Reaching the open space, the young man deposited his burden upon a grassy knoll, and as he did so, felt something cold touch the back of his neck. It was the muzzle of his horse, which in this way sought to attract the attention of his master.

“Ha, old horse!” he said, “you don’t want to leave me, after all. Great heavens, if this poor child should be dead! It seems so terrible—one so beautiful and young.”

He knelt beside her, chafing the cold hands and bathing her face and nostrils in spirits which he poured from his flask. An hour passed, and he still bent above the beautiful girl, striving to bring her back to life. The thunder might crash above him, the red bolts tear the giant trees in twain, but he never noticed it. To save this helpless one—to bring her back to life at any hazard—this was his only thought. Did

that eyelid quiver? No, it was but the last gleam of the lightning upon the cold face. He searched in his saddle-bags—for the horse still stood trembling beside him—and found a small hand-mirror set into the back of a hair-brush, and held it over the unconscious girl's lips waiting for the lightning to light up the sky again. But, when it came, he found it impossible to say whether or not her breath had burred the glass.

The rain now began to fall in torrents, and he had not yet succeeded in bringing her back to life. He must find some shelter for her from the pitiless storm. Even if dead, he could not bear the thought of seeing one so lovely lying drenched and cold upon the grass. Springing to his feet, he looked hastily about him and saw a great rocky bluff or niche a few rods distant, and ran toward it, hoping to find among the rocks some shelter from the storm. A projecting shelf ran out from the crest of the ridge, and there was a space some four feet wide underneath which seemed to be dry. He ran back and carried his inanimate charge to this welcome shelter, while the dumb beast followed him as before.

There was a blanket strapped behind the saddle, and taking this off he wrapped the girl in its folds, and as he did so became conscious that the warmth of her body had not left it. He placed his hand close to her mouth and uttered a cry of delight as he felt the evidence, slight but conclusive, that she still breathed. The strong man dropped upon his knees beside her, and actually burst into tears. She was saved now, if he could keep her warm, and he wrapped the blanket more closely about her; then seating himself in such a fashion as to shelter her as much as possible from the cold wind which now began to blow, he continued to bathe her face in the spirits. The lightning had now ceased, the rain was falling more slowly and the darkness was intense, so much so that he could not see her face, yet he held her in his arms, sheltering her from the storm, and felt a throb of delicious joy with every pulse of his noble heart as he felt her's beating against his own. Directly after she stirred a little, and he heard a faint, sweet voice whisper:

“Father.”

He made no reply.

"Conrad, is it you?"

Still he did not speak.

"Where am I? Who brought me to this place? I saw the blinding flash, felt a terrible shock, and after that—a blank. Who holds me? Why do you not speak?"

"Keep quiet, dear lady," said the young man. "You are still weak, and the least exertion may do you harm."

"I must see your face," she said, softly, "but your voice is good. Let me touch your hand."

Their hands met in the darkness and for a moment a delicious silence reigned in the darkness.

"It is the hand of a good man—one who would not do a woman wrong to save his life. I trust you as I would my brother."

"You *may*," replied the young man, impulsively. "No matter how much I may fail in all else, I hope I am a man of honor. You are safe with me."

"What is your name?"

"Harry Sanderson."

"Your nation?"

"A Yankee, blood and bones—one who would peril any thing for the sake of the dear old flag."

"Good; a native of what State?"

"A New Yorker, forced by a chain of circumstances which I cannot control to come to western Kansas."

"You must think me very inquisitive, but I feel impelled to ask these questions. What is your age?"

"Twenty-six. I will tell you all about myself. I am a physician, graduated two years ago from the Albany Medical College in the State of New York. I am alone in the world. My mother died when I was but a child, and my father, noble old man, came to Kansas eighteen months ago, and has not been heard from since."

He felt the girl start suddenly, but she did not speak for a moment.

"You have come to search for your father?"

"Yes."

"Have you any clue?"

At best but slight ones, yet upon this slight ground I will follow him and never leave off the search until I have found

my father or know that he is dead. Now that I have told you this, may I ask you some questions?"

"You must ask me nothing," the girl replied. "I am one whom it is not safe for you to know, one whom to follow would bring you into the greatest danger. You have saved my life. I know it and am grateful for it, and I can show my gratitude in no better way than in counseling you to leave me and never see me more."

"But I cannot do that. I must see you again—must know who you are and prove to you that I am not utterly unworthy of your regard."

"Hush," she said, softly. "What you speak of can never be, for if you saw me as I am and knew me for what I am, perhaps you would despise me. Promise that you will go away from this section and never come back."

"You ask too much," he said, moodily. "I have a mission to perform and must do my work. If my father is dead I must know it, and how he died as well. If by violence, I shall know how to take vengeance upon his slayers."

She shook off the blanket which was still wrapped about her and arose. The storm had now ceased, the clouds were breaking away and the moon came riding out in the clear sky. Her face was more beautiful than ever, now that her color was coming back, but there was a touch of anger in it as she looked at him.

"How can you hope to find your father, when, as you tell me, you have no clue?"

"Patience and perseverance will do much," he answered, quietly. "I am not the man to succumb to small trials and dangers."

"Annette!" cried a harsh voice not far away. "Nettie, I say! where are you?"

Harry would have spoken but the girl put her hand upon his mouth and he understood that he must keep silent.

"That is a man whom you must not meet, whom you must not know," she whispered. "I am going away and probably we shall never meet again, but I shall keep your name in my heart and bless it to my dying day. Good-by, and Heaven bless you."

The voice was again heard calling the name of Nettie, and

seemed to be approaching. He seized her hand and kissed it, but the next moment she had snatched it from him and disappeared in the gloom, and he heard her answering the call of the new-comer.

"This way, curse it!" cried the voice. "A pretty time for a man to turn out to look for a head-strong girl who ought to know better. Where are you?"

"Here I am," she answered. "I was forced to seek a shelter from the storm."

They moved away together, the man grumbling and Annette endeavoring to pacify him.

"A strange adventure," muttered Harry, as the voices died away in the distance. "Well, I can go no further to-night; and now for a camp."

He took a lariat from his saddle-bow and picketed the horse by the side of the wood. This done, he smoked a pipe or two, and then, wrapping his blanket about him, lay down beneath the projecting shelf and slept until morning."

CHAPTER II.

THE CENTER SHOT.

It came bright and clear, the rain of the preceding night having completely cleared the atmosphere. The young man hastily partook of an early breakfast from some cold meat and "pone" bread which he had in his saddle-bags. This, with a draught of cold water from the stream near by, completed his meal and he was ready to pursue his way. He had just risen and was tightening the strap of his saddle-bags, when the sound of horses' hoofs and a clear mellow whistle broke the silence of the place, and a sharp-looking lad, perhaps fifteen years of age, rode up at a smart canter.

"I say, my boy," said Harry, "how far do you call it to the next house?"

"Public, do you mean? We ain't got many of that sort in this section."

"No, a house of any kind. I want to make my head-quarters at some place near-by, and am ready to pay for the privilege."

"You'd better come to our house, then," said the boy. "That is, if you can put up with common fare, for we are plain people out here."

"I don't care about the accommodations, and will pay as well as if they were of the best. What I want is to get acquainted about here in order to prosecute an inquiry I am obliged to make."

"Then, see here," said the boy. "I can show you a chance to get acquainted that you won't be likely to have again soon. There's a "vendue" up the country about three miles, and they are going to have a barbecue and heaps of fun, and all the men will be there for miles around. Why not go with me and introduce yourself to the people?"

"Capital, my lad," said Harry, eagerly; "your plan is a good one, and it really matters very little where I go, so long as I am doing my work. I am with you."

He sprung at once into the saddle, and the two rode back over the path which he had pursued the night before. Traces of the destructive course of the storm became more and more plain as they proceeded. Trees had fallen in great numbers, and in some cases they were forced to ride round through the woods to escape a *chevaux de frise* of fallen timber in the path. After riding about two miles the boy turned off to the right, with Harry by his side.

"Now let us understand one another, my boy," said Harry, after having given the boy his name and profession. "I think it best not to mention my business in this vicinity. Let it be thought that I am in search of adventure, hunting, fishing, and the like, and I will tell you at some other time who I am searching for. What is your name?"

"Jim Sedley. I'm *awake*, too, Mr. Sanderson, and I reckon they won't make any too much out of questioning me. By jinks, they are coming in fast."

They had now reached a place where they could command quite a view of the surrounding country. About a mile below was a "four corners" and two or three houses, and quite a group of men were already congregated there, while many

mounted men could be seen coming in by the different roads, to attend the "vendue." What is a "vendue?"

The term comes from the law phrase "public vendue," and applies to a sale of miscellaneous articles at auction. In the border States they are very common and largely attended, as in the present case, and are generally made a holiday, the young men engaging in field-sports of all kinds, while the heads of families come to drive a good bargain in any thing which may offer.

"Our boys are a rough lot, stranger," said Jim Sedley, "and you must not try to put on any *style* over them. Be as frank and free as you like, take hold with the rest in the fun and they'll take to you; but, try to put on any 'French airs' and they won't be suited."

"I think I know the temper of the Kansas men," replied the young physician; "still, if you see me doing or saying any thing which is not according to rule, you must give me a hint."

The boy nodded and the two rode down to the cross-roads and dismounted in front of what proved to be a small tavern. The groups of tough-looking borderers looked hard at the stranger, and there was a slight movement of surprise, as Harry showed in his bearing that he was "from the States," and a stranger is quite an event among these unlettered men.

"I'll take care of the hosses, Mr. Sanderson," said Jim. "You stay here until I come back. Joe Bagley, here!"

A man in the dress of a hunter came up.

"Joe," said Sedley, "this is Mr. Harry Sanderson, from York State, come out to Kansas to see a little fun. You take care of him while I am gone, will you?"

"Looks as ef he mou't be able to take keer of himself," said Joe, as they shook hands. "Glad to see you, Mr. Sanderson; always glad to see strangers from the States to bring us the news. Any thing stirring there?"

"Much the same as usual," replied Harry. "A good many of our young men are breaking away from the stony acres their fathers have tilled so long to try the new States in the West. I think that they are right, too."

"Stranger, they *ar'*! Mighty right, I should say. It's

a wonderment to me how men kin live as they do in St. Jo' and St. Lou', cramped up in narrer streets that it's as much as a man's life is wuth to cross, when they kin hev the wide fields of Kansas for a song."

At this moment a man passed who looked hard at Harry, who in turn recognized the fellow who had been spokesman in the meeting of the day before.

"Who is that man?" said Harry.

"That's Bill Brace, a mighty hard nut, if I do say it. He and I will have it hot an' heavy one of these fine days. I believe he's one of the Night-hawks."

"I ask the question because I had a quarrel with him yesterday," said Harry. "It even went so far that we were forced to draw weapons, but I persuaded him to move on."

A look of delight came into the face of the hunter.

"I knowed it, stranger; I were sartin of it. I knowed you wa'n't no chicken when you let yer angry passhins rise."

"Who are the Night-hawks?" asked Harry.

"They claim ter be hunters an' trappers but I don't swaller it. Ef they wouldn't steal horses or cut a throat I don't want a cent, an' Bill Brace is one of 'em. What did the mean cuss want?"

"It was simply a question whether or not I would ride between two armed strangers on a lonely road," said Harry, carelessly. "I objected, and he saw the force of my reasoning."

"P'inted, I'll bet," said Joe. "Showed a barker on him, didn't ye?"

"I was obliged to do so."

"I wish we had something sartin to call out Judge Lynch on," said Joe, "but that devil is mighty keerful. We can't trace any thing to him or any of the shy birds he consorts with. Now you notice who I shake hands with as we go through the crowd, and the men I don't *re-cognize* in that way ain't the sort you want to know; understand?"

"All right; go ahead!"

They moved about among the people, and with most of them Joe, who had but just come, exchanged greetings, but with some he was very cold, passing them with a careless

nod. Among others was the companion of Bill Brace, whom Joe did not recognize at all. Harry made the acquaintance of quite a number of men before Jim Sedley came back with his father—a broad-shouldered, middle-aged man in plain homespun dress.

“Jim tells me that you want to put up at my house for a few weeks, sir,” said Mr. Sedley, after they had shaken hands. “You are welcome, hearty; that’s all I can say.”

“Much obliged, sir. I must stay in this section for a while, and as your son made the offer, I was very glad to accept it.”

The vendue would not come off for an hour, and in the mean time they walked out on a meadow to witness an exhibition of skill in rifle practice, which was already going on. They were firing at a blaze in a tree about two hundred yards distant, and although some capital shots had been made, no one had succeeded in touching the center. At this moment a young man in a somewhat rich dress for a man in that region—a hunting suit of dark cloth—advanced and took position at the stand. He did not seem to take a careful aim, but, raising his rifle, quickly pulled the trigger.

“Missed the tree,” screamed a voice behind them. “Missed it altogether!”

“Who says that?” cried the marksman, turning a savage look at the speaker.

“No, no,” said Joe Bagley. “Conrad is a good shot, and unless I’m very much mistaken you will find the bullet in the white.”

So it proved upon examination, for the bullet had entered the tree within an inch of the center, the best shot of the day, so far.

“That is something like shooting,” cried the successful marksman. “I can shoot better than any man in Kansas, and I will wager fifty dollars on it.”

“Oh, pshaw,” said Joe. “Don’t brag too much, Conrad Thurston, or like ’nuff I’ll take up the iron myself.”

Conrad! Harry remembered that when Annette heard the voice calling her, the night before, she had spoken that name. He looked closely at the successful rifleman, and saw a handsome fellow about his own age, a perfect specimen of physical grace. He was a trifle below six feet in height, with

smoothly-chiseled features, a fierce black eye, and thin, cruel-looking lips. In spite of his prepossessing appearance, Harry felt an instinctive dislike of him, but his attention was called away as Joe took his rifle, angry at the taunts of Conrad, and advanced to the shooting-stand. He, too, fired quickly and succeeded in making a good shot, although not quite so good as Thurston's.

"I told you so," said Conrad, as the result was announced. "I can beat any man—*any* man, mind, now in the State of Kansas—for a hundred dollars. Who is for ducats? Who has any conceit of his shooting? Have you, Jack Phelps—you, Walton—Fletcher—King? You have no pluck or money among you."

"Wait a moment," said Harry. "I don't want to bet, neither will I do so, but I should like a shot at that target."

Thurston turned upon him with a supercilious smile upon his face. The idea of a man from the States offering to shoot against some of the best marksmen of the West was to him simply ridiculous, and if the truth must be told, those who were friendly with Harry thought him somewhat presumptuous.

"I don't want to do any thing against the rules," said Harry, "but, if none of you object, I will take a shot."

"You are welcome to shoot," said Thurston, contemptuously, stepping aside to give him room. Then turning to Joe, he said, in a tone loud enough to be heard by every one—"I'll bet you five dollars that he does not touch the white."

"I'll risk five on him," said Joe, producing a greasy wallet. "I don't allow any one of the Thurston breed to back me down. That's bluffing, you know, old hoss."

"Make it twenty, then."

"Twenty it is!" said Joe, placing the amount in the hands of a friend. "Cover it."

Thurston did so, laughing at the thought of so easily winning the hunter's money.

Harry, with his own rifle, walked to the standing-spot and fired, seemingly off-hand. No one in the crowd thought it possible that he could have touched the tree at all until they heard the dull "thud" of the bullet. The markers ran to the tree, and every one waited for their decision.

"Center!" cried one of the markers, holding up his hand. The bullet had struck the white between those planted by Thurston and Joe, directly in the center of the blaze! Nothing was so calculated to win the good-will of border-men as a successful shot, and they crowded about Harry to congratulate him; each one grieved at heart that he had not taken Conrad Thurston's bet.

"It was all an accident," cried Thurston. "Any man could see that he did not take aim."

Harry began to be nettled by this conduct on the part of a stranger, and spoke up boldly.

"I don't think it was an accident," he said. "I can hit such a mark as that, barring accidents, nine times out of ten, but it is not a first-class test. Let us take our stand further off, and I will shoot again."

They withdrew to two hundred and fifty yards from the mark, and Thurston, as before, made an excellent shot, planting his bullet near the center.

"Hold on," he said, as Harry stepped to his place. "I want to bet you a hundred that you do not beat *that* shot."

"I never bet," replied Harry, coldly. "And I would not advise any one to risk their money on me, as I may fail."

"I never take water," cried Joe. "If he beats, a few more beaver have got to die for it, that's all. I'm your boy, Conrad, on that hundred!"

In spite of the protestations of Harry, who knew how little an accident might spoil the shot, the money was put up, cleaning out the greasy wallet completely. Harry stepped to his place with a smile upon his lip, brought the rifle to his shoulder and glanced along the brown barrel. The rifle cracked and the markers darted to the tree and searched for the bullet, but they seemed to be in doubt, and Conrad laughed.

"He has missed completely," he cried. "We don't allow any men to come out from the States and beat us at our own game."

Harry had dropped his rifle into the hollow of his arm and was looking steadily toward the target.

"Don't give up that money yet," he said, "for, unless I

am very much mistaken, you will find my second bullet over the first. I rarely miss at that distance."

Half a dozen men started for the tree and began to dig out the bullet, and Conrad, accompanied by Joe, being especially interested in the result, hurried after them. A few moments' work with knives revealed the fact that there were, indeed, two bullets imbedded in the tree, one exactly above the other. Thurston uttered a furious oath; his face became livid with passion, and he turned savagely upon Joe Bagley, who was laughing.

"Don't drive me too far, Bagley, or I might ask you to take a walk with me."

"If you did, like enuff I'd go," replied Joe, laying a hand upon his knife. "Take keer what you do, Con Thurston; I ain't the man to be threatened for nothing."

"As for you, young man," Thurston added, turning upon Harry, "Ycu may find this a very unhealthy section to live in, and a very easy place to *die* in."

"Hush, Con," whispered Bill Brace, pushing him back. "What the devil! Do you want to bring a hornet's nest about our ears? Don't mind what he says, stranger. He is vexed because you beat him at his own game."

"I have no quarrel with him," said Harry, "and should not have taken part in the shooting if I had thought it would make bad blood, and shall certainly shoot no more."

Thurston was hurried away by his friends, and though he was defiant for a time, he suddenly cooled down when Brace whispered something in his ear. Soon after he disappeared, and Harry walked away with Joe Bagley, the center of an admiring crowd.

"He's a good plucked 'un," said an old settler. "Come on, boys, there's the horses coming out and the vendee is going to begin."

As he spoke a number of horses were let into the inclosure, and the auctioneer mounted a stump and began the sale.

CHAPTER III.

THE MASONIC PIN.

It is needless to recount the manner of the sale, which was conducted in the usual way, by an erratic genius from the State of Maine, who assumed a roughness of demeanor and talk suited to the party to whom he was speaking. His broad allusions and coarse wit were hailed with shouts of laughter from the assembled crowd, who were delighted when some individual retired within himself after a trial of wit with the sharp Yankee auctioneer. The horses went off rapidly, and every one supposed the sale over, when the auctioneer again called their attention to something which he held in his hand.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I now offer you for sale an article which has been placed in my hands for disposal, by a gentleman who has no use for it, as he is not entitled to wear it. I may say that it is a beautiful Masonic pin, the rare workmanship of which would excite the admiration of any judge of the artistic, and would be especially prized by one who belongs to the great order of Freemasonry. It combines within itself all the emblems of importance in the degree of Malta, and is a wonder of art in every respect. I know those among you who are entitled to wear it, and to such only will I sell it, for I would not think it proper for a man to wear it who had not the *right* to do so. I wish you would look at it, sir."

He placed the pin in the hands of Harry Sanderson, who had no sooner looked at it than he started and turned as pale as death.

"I know this pin, sir," he cried, in a hoarse, strained voice. "Where did you get it?"

"I am hardly at liberty to tell you that," replied the auctioneer. "After I have seen the gentleman who placed it in my hands for sale, not half an hour since, I will tell who he is. Make a bid upon the article."

"One hundred dollars," cried Harry, promptly.

The auctioneer stared, for the young man had named about the full value of the pin. But he went on with the sale, and it was knocked down to Harry without competition, who secured his prize and called Mr. Sedley away from the crowd to show it to him.

"Do you see this?" he whispered. "I will tell you why I am here, and then you will understand my emotion when I saw this beautiful emblem. My father, Colonel Sanderson, came to Kansas over eighteen months ago in search of a man who had wronged him. I heard of him in a village not thirty miles away, but from that time to this, I have not seen his face nor heard from him. My father was a Mason, and when he went away *he wore this pin.*"

"Ha! Do you think that he has had foul-play?"

"I know it. If he were alive I should have heard from him long ago. I have given my life to the task of avenging him upon the villains who have robbed and murdered him."

"What sort of a man was your father? In looks, I mean?"

"Six feet high, straight as an arrow, fifty years of age, with iron-gray whiskers and mustache. As noble a man in appearance as you ever beheld."

Sedley struck his hand sharply on his thigh.

"I have seen him, as I live," he cried. "Eighteen months ago such a man as you describe came to my cabin, inquiring for a man whom he called Hugh Graham, whom, he had been informed, lived in this part of Kansas. I could give him no information and he rode away, and from that hour to this I have not heard of him."

"What road did he take?"

"The one over which you passed to-day."

"Then he came through the woods in which I passed the night?"

"He must have done so."

"Let us be wary in this business, my friend. The least note of danger may alarm the felons who have done this work, and they may cover their tracks so that it would be impossible to trail them. Do you give me your aid in bringing the assassins to justice?"

"Yes ; I am with you heart and hand."

While they were yet speaking the auctioneer, who had disappeared for a moment, made his appearance, looking for Harry.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that the man from whom I received the pin does not wish his name to be known."

"And you refuse to tell it?"

"I would prefer not, as he insists upon it."

"You are willing to allow," said Harry, looking at the man in a strange way, "that the original owner of this pin, if entitled to wear it, had a claim upon you stronger than any man to whom that right did *not* belong?"

The man nodded, with a look of strange meaning in his eyes.

"And if I tell you that this man did really have that right, that I believe some great wrong has been done him, and that by means of this pin I hope to unearth the villainy, what have you to say?"

"I *must* tell you, I suppose," said the auctioneer, slowly. "If you give me your word that what you say is true—not on the *cross*, mind—I will let you know who gave me the pin."

"I give you my word in the way you require."

"Then watch me as I move about among the crowd. I may speak to several persons, but the one whom I am speaking to when I raise my hat and run my fingers through my hair, in this manner, is the one you want."

"Thank you, *brother* ! Now, let me ask you to keep what we have said a secret. It is not to be talked of any where, without my consent."

Mr. Sedley had been looking on with a smiling face while this conversation went on.

"I am glad that the man happened to be a *Mason*, Mr. Sanderson," said he. "I may as well let you know that I am one, also. In the course of the day I will give you the names of all who are of the brotherhood—and they are more than you think—so that you may know who to depend on."

"Thanks, again ; now let us watch our friend, the auctioneer."

This man was moving slowly about among the crowd, now speaking to this man and then to that, until he stopped in

front of a group composed of Conrad Thurston, Bill Brace, and two others, rough-looking fellows. He spoke directly to Conrad, and, in doing so, raised his hat and ran his fingers through his thick hair, and then passed on.

"You see that, Mr. Sedley," whispered the young man. "I have found the man who had my father's pin. Now, can you tell me any thing of him?"

"I am afraid I can tell you little," said Sedley. "He is a sporting man, who has but lately come into this section, although it is evident that he has had a good frontier education. He gambles, buys and sells horses, which he gets somehow, and that is all I can say."

"He has a bad eye, and is capable of a base deed, or my knowledge of physiognomy is at fault. That retreating forehead and bulging skull were not given to stamp him for an honest man. We must watch him."

"He is coming this way. Now, I think he will offer you a wager, and you must accept it and name me as stakeholder. If I am not mistaken he sold that pin because he had lost all his money to Joe, and is anxious to get even. When he puts up the money we can see if it is the same you gave the auctioneer."

"Five twenties on the Bank of Commerce, New York City. Hush! here he is," said Harry.

Conrad came up hastily, his face somewhat flushed by liquor, flourishing a handful of bank-notes.

"Look here," he said, in a thick voice; "you see this money, don't you? I'm going to put it up on my shooting. An even hundred I beat you in a series of five shots at any distance you may name."

"I am not afraid to shoot with any one, my young friend," said Harry, coolly. "I don't wish to brag on my shooting, but *you* are not the man to beat me."

"Put your money up, then. Brag won't go down with the Kansas boys, you know. Put up or shut up—that's my motto."

"Put your money in Mr. Sedley's hands," said Harry, taking out his wallet and selecting two fifty-dollar bills.

The young borderer at once complied with the request, and, as Mr. Sedley took the money, Harry arrested his hand.

"Stop," he said; "let me see if the money is right. You are at liberty to examine mine."

He took the money and turned it over hastily. Five twenties on the Bank of Commerce; the same which he had put into the hands of the auctioneer!

"Now, allow me to ask you a question, Mr. Thuiston: Where did you get this money?"

"What is that to you?" blustered Conrad. "It is good money, is it not?"

"Good enough, since it came from my own pocket less than half an hour ago. You received this money, sir, in payment for this pin, which I bid in. And now, sir, where did you get the *pin*?"

Conrad turned pale, and thrust his hand into the bosom of his hunting-shirt as if searching for a weapon; but half a dozen men pinioned him instantly.

"Hands off, you hounds!" he screamed. "Do you think I will let any adventurer come into Kansas and insult me? Hands off, I say, or it will be the worse for some of you."

"Don't worry too much, Con," said Joe, who was holding his right wrist. "It only riles your temper to no purpose, and we ain't the men to skeer easy. Now, then, tell him where you got the pin."

"It is none of his business *where* I got it. I won't have my actions misjudged by any man alive, especially a stranger. Boys, will you hear me? Will you let a stranger run on a Kansas boy this way, and not give him a show? I only want a fair shake."

"Listen to me, men," cried Harry. "This pin is the property of my father, whom I am seeking, and I want to know *how* this fellow got possession of it. I *will* know, too, if I have to cut the knowledge out of his black heart. Don't hold him; I am not afraid of any man of his kidney."

"But, he's quick on the trigger," said Joe. "I reckon we'd do better to hold him jest a little while. Bill Brace, if you put your ugly mug too close to mine you might git it sp'iled, like enuff."

"Why don't you speak, Con?" said Bill. "Tell the gentleman where you got the pin; it is no more than right to help him in looking for his father."

"If that is all you want," said Conrad, "you may take your hands off me, for I promise not to draw a weapon on him now. You ask me where I found that pin—"

"Or stole it," said Joe. "It don't make much differ."

"I'll call you to account for that word one day, Joe Bagley," said Conrad, in a fierce tone. "I found that pin, sir, at the root of a tree on the west road, just as you pass through the woods."

"That's so," said Bill Brace; "I was with him at the time. It looked to me as ef some one had camped down under the tree the night before, fur thar' was hoof-marks all round there, and a place where a picket-pin had been stuck into the ground."

"How long ago was this?" demanded Harry.

"I think it were about eighteen months ago. I know it was in the month of April, and we was going to Kansas City—Con and I."

"I have no reason to doubt your word," said Harry, after a moment's reflection, "and I don't know as I have any thing else to ask you at present."

"I won't forget you, my fighting-chicken," said Conrad, as he took his money and turned away. "I never forget a man who has insulted me."

"You know where I am to be found," said Harry. "Now, Sedley, let us go down and see the ball-play."

The group was broken up and went down into the meadow, where the field-sports were already in progress. Conrad, however, had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

THE night was already coming on when Harry, accompanied by Joe Bagley, Sedley and his son James, got out their horses to ride home. Joe was in high spirits, for he had won a considerable amount of money at the vendue, besides doing a good trade in horse-flesh. They rode at

a brisk pace, but, do all they could, it was dark when they reached the woods, and Sedley cautioned them to see to their weapons.

"We have some hard seeds here, on the border," he said, "and I must say that you showed your wallet too often at the vendue, Mr. Sanderson. Besides that, they know that Joe has three or four hundred dollars, quite enough temptation for some of the men I saw at the sale. The Night-hawks are none too good to go for it."

Just then there was a rustling in the bushes in front and a slight figure stole out into the road. Even in the obscurity of the place, Harry, with a thrill of delight, recognized Nettie, the girl he had protected the night before!

"I am glad that I came in time, gentlemen," she whispered, coming close to Sanderson. "You are in danger."

"In danger; from whom?"

"I cannot tell you that. There is a number of armed men in ambush, and I heard them say that they would waylay and perhaps murder you, as you passed through the woods. Turn back, then, for heaven's sake, or there will be bloodshed."

"Who is it?" said Sedley, bending forward in the saddle. "Nettie Forbes?"

"Yes, Mr. Sedley; you know that I would not deceive you, and there are certainly too many for you to fight. Nine or ten men at the least."

"Could you see their faces, Nettie?"

"They all wore masks of black crape," she replied, in a low voice. "I must not stay here or I may be in danger myself. I have given you warning; take care of yourselves."

She was gone so quickly, that no one thought of stopping her.

"I wish I could understand that gal," said Joe, "or what there is about that black scoundrel, Con Thurston, to make her like him; but, sich is life. Ain't she a beauty, though? Pity such a gal should lead the life she does."

"Who is she?" demanded Harry, eagerly. "I must know, for I have a strange interest in her."

"Umph! The less you have to say to her or her friends, the better; but, we have no time to talk about that now. What is to be done?"

"I say ride through the woods, in spite of all the masked assassins in Kansas," cried Harry.

"Plucky, my boy, but hardly *wise*," said Mr. Sedley. "No ; you have made yourself enemies already—crafty and bloody enemies, who will stop at nothing to compass your death, and we must meet craft with craft. What do you say, Joe ?"

"I ain't partial to gittin' rubbed out by a bullet from behind a tree," said Joe. "Reckon we'd better git round 'em, somehow."

"Jump down there and take out a panel in the fence, Jim," said Mr. Sedley to his boy. "I'll hold your horse. Now, lead the way through the cattle-path, and move as quietly as you can."

The boy knew the country well and led them by a path which the cattle had made through the woods, cutting off a bend in the road, and making the path home half a mile shorter. The horses seemed to partake of their caution, and not a stick snapped as they proceeded, and none of the riders spoke. They were nearly half way through, when a shrill whistle was heard, and a bullet whizzed between Harry Sanderson and Bagley.

"Ride !" cried Sedley ; "ride for your lives. We can do nothing in this woods against hidden enemies. They are all around us."

The darkness of the place was lighted up by the constant flash of firearms, and through it the party dashed with shouts of defiance, emptying their revolvers into the bushes as they rode. The trees flew by as if on wings, and the party dashed out into the main road and headed toward Sedley's at a furious pace. Then for the first time Joe Bagley saw that Harry's horse was following them riderless ! and a cry of agony burst from the lips of the brave hunter.

"Rubbed out, by lightning ! Look here, Sedley ; oh, look here ! That brave young 'un has gone under."

They halted and looked in each other's faces, in confusion and dismay, and began to realize the full extent of the misfortune. How had he fallen without alarm of any kind ?

"Shot dead, I'll bet money," groaned Joe. "Look here, Sedley, I'm a rough kind of man, I know—I've done some mean things in my time, but this is the meanest of all. We three riding away like devils and leaving that poor young chap dead or wounded with them bloody thieves. Let's go back."

"Back it is!" said Mr. Sedley, sternly. "Jim, we don't want you in this. If I go down your mother will want your help, and she can't spare both."

"Oh, pap, let me go. I'll never learn any thing if I lose such a chance as this—never in this world!" whined Jim.

"You *can't* go. I want you to take the horses and ride up to Fralick's and call out Pat and Dan. Tell them what is up, and ask them to bring their shooting-irons and come down. We don't want the horses, Joe; this has got to be a secret."

Joe sprung from the saddle, and the boy, passing a lariat through the bit-rings of the three horses, rode down the road at a hasty pace, leaving his father and Joe Bagley standing upon the beaten pathway.

"I'd rather have lost any thing I have in the world, than to leave that young fellow as we did, Sedley," said Joe. "Look to your pistols; we'll want 'em, sure."

They turned back into the woods, taking another path, which would bring them more quickly to the scene of the late attack. The forest was now silent as death, only the rush of the night-bird's wing and the dismal croaking of the frogs disturbing it. But these sounds seem a part of solitude, and hardly seem to break the silence of the forest. Treading in each other's steps, advancing with a celerity and caution which only long habit could have imparted, they quickly neared the spot where the first attack had been made, when they heard the sound of voices not far away.

"What devil put it into their heads to take this path, I should like to know?" said a hoarse voice. "It would almost seem as if they had warning of danger."

"I don't believe they did," replied another. "That Sedley is a cunning old fox, and like enuff he smelled revolvers. Joe Bagley is no baby, either, and don't like our boys any too well."

"They have got away, anyhow, and with whole hides; but they are not done with us yet. Sedley knows too much; it is time he went to sleep."

"And Bagley, too."

"Yes; Joe has run the length of his rope, but he won't die easy," assented the other.

It was as much as Bagley could do to keep from chuckling aloud as this encomium was pronounced.

"Let's go over and see the others, boys," said the first speaker. "Maybe they had better luck than we did. Any one hit?"

"I've got it through the neck," replied one of the men, faintly. "I wish some one would tie it up."

"Wait till we get a light," replied the other. "Come along; the commander will be crazy when he hears that they have got off."

"I thought for a minute he was going to kill Con when we told him about the pin. It was touch and go, I tell you. Sometimes the old man shoots before he thinks and begs pardon afterward."

"I don't want him down on me. The only one who can do any thing with him in his raging moods is Nettie, and he don't dare to touch her. Phew! Ain't she a bu'ster when she gets real mad once? And you would not think it, to look at her."

"Nettie is too high and mighty with the boys to suit me," replied the first voice, gruffly; "but that's the commander's look out. If he will have her here it is nobody's fault except his own."

"Talk enough, boys; come along or you'll get pepper. We don't want Sedley to raise a gang and come down on us before we can get to cover."

They moved away through the woods carelessly, and as soon as they were out of sight Joe arose with a puzzled face.

"Where can Harry be, Sedley? They ain't got him yet, that's plain."

"The poor fellow is dead, I am afraid. They did not follow us after we broke through, and he kept the saddle then, for I saw him. I stooped down to clear a low branch, and as I heard the horse following I thought of course it was all

right. Let's follow the path back and see what has become of him."

They skirted the bushes a little way and came out upon the path which they followed to the edge of the woods, but could see nothing of Harry. If he had been killed or wounded, the body had been carried away to hide the evidence of the crime.

"There's another party out there, and I am afraid that they have got him," said Sedley. "It seems to me that I hear horses."

The sound of approaching hoofs grew louder, and as the moon was now above the trees, Sedley recognized the foremost as his son.

"There is Jim back again," he observed, "and he has some one with him. Hi, Jim!"

The boy rode up accompanied by two stalwart men of the border, perfect *fac similes* in face and form.

"Now thin, phat is the matther, byes?" said the first, in a rich brogue. "By the piper that played while the king danced, if there is going to be a foight we are the byes must have a share in it, Dan and mesilf."

They were Dan and Pat Fralick, two of Sedley's friends.

"And it's roight ye are, honey," said the other. "I'll bate the hed av ony spalpeen that sez otherways."

"We can't find our friend, Pat," said Sedley. "Joe and I have scouted back over the path, and found a number of armed men in the woods, but not a sign of Harry Sander-son, and we heard one of them say that they had not seen him."

"It's a puzzle altogither, thin," said Pat Fralick. "Phat will yees do now? Av ye say the word, we'll go wid yees intil that bush and clane out the divils, body an' bones."

"I am afraid they would be too many for us."

"G'way wid ye! An honest man can bate a dozen blagards," said Dan.

"I think not, Dan. Hows'ever, if you are for a row, we will go into the woods again. Jim, stay with the horses."

The boy shook his head and muttered to himself; he did not like the task imposed upon him. He came of fighting blood and wanted a hand in the business before him; but,

bred to obey his father, he kept his place, grasping his small rifle angrily.

"They think I'm nothing but a boy," he muttered, as the four brave men plunged into the forest. "But, I'll teach them one of those days that I know how to do a man's work. Who goes there? Halt!"

He had seen something moving in the bushes close at hand. Without a moment's thought as to the danger, he threw his bridle over a swinging bough, grasped his rifle and leaped to the earth, darting into the bushes with a quickness which bade defiance to flight, and came upon the girl called Nettie, who was standing in the shadow of the bushes.

"I'm not going to run, Jim," she said, quietly. "What do you want?"

"Oh," said Jim, confusedly, "I didn't think it was you, Nettie. How did you get here without being seen?"

"I know all the paths through the woods," she answered, calmly, "and as the night is dark, I had no trouble in eluding them. What has been done? Tell me, or I shall go mad."

"We've lost that young stranger," said Jim, slowly, "but they ain't got hold of him yet as I knows on. The old man, Joe Bagley and the two Fralicks have gone after him."

"They are brave men, but will only get themselves into trouble. Indeed, *indeed*, Jim, they don't know the danger. The men they will be opposed to are desperate ruffians, who will stop at no crime to shield themselves."

"They won't put our boys down so easy," said Jim, with a scornful look. "I guess you never see the Fralicks in a fight. Lordy! It would do your heart good to see them clean out a bar-room with their shillalehs. "Whoop!" sez Pat; "whoop!" sez Dan; and then you oughter see the fur fly! Joe Bagley is a whole team and a big dog, and the old man can sort o' fight, too."

"I know that they are gallant men, but they will be over-matched even if the mean villains would fight fair. But, they are assassins at heart, and will shoot their enemies down under cover of the bushes."

"I'd like to know what you have got to do with such a gang," said Jim, in a wondering tone. "I can't get it through my head."

"Ask me no questions, Jim," she answered, wildly. "I am bound by an oath which I can not break, to reveal nothing, for the first word I speak would be the doom of one whom I am bound to by the most sacred ties. There; I must go. If I am missed I don't know what would happen. Tell your father to be careful, for he is bringing a terrible danger upon himself by his course."

She darted away into the woods, leaving Jim lost in wonder. Taking paths known only to herself, she pushed rapidly through the woods for a mile, and came out breathless upon the road near the spot where she had first met Harry Sanderson. Hurrying down the road for a little distance, she reached a bridle-path which led to the east and pursued it for a quarter of a mile, until she came to a log-house standing close to the path. Pushing open the door she entered a sort of bar-room, rudely fitted up, and breathed more freely as she saw that the room was empty.

"How thankful I am that they have not returned," she muttered. "Oh, what shall I do if they make that brave young man prisoner?"

She set about replenishing the fire, which had burned low, and while thus engaged the door was pushed open without ceremony, and a tall Indian, armed with rifle, knife and hatchet, stood upon the threshold. He was a hardy-looking savage, with the thews and sinews which a fearless life had given him, yet had a kindly look in his large black eyes. This was "Happy Bill," a Sioux, who had made Kansas his home for years, having been banished from his tribe for some great fault. Nettie knew him well and had no fear of him, for he was welcomed in all the cabins of that section, and was known to be a man of strict honesty.

He subsisted by hunting and trapping, and, as he entered the cabin, flung down a large string of prairie-chickens which he carried upon his shoulder.

"How do, white girl?" he said, with a beaming smile. "Happy Bill come."

"You are welcome, Happy," she said; "sit down; the men are all gone."

Happy nodded gravely, and seating himself beside the great fire-place, took out a pipe and tobacco-pouch, loaded

the pipe and lighted it with a brand from the fire. The fragrance of the Kilikinic filled the room, and, as the Indian sat there, with his kindly face beaming upon Nettie, she thought how little he deserved the name of savage as compared with some men whom she knew.

"Where fadder gone?" demanded Happy, after a pause.

"I don't know, Happy," she replied, with a slight shudder. "I hope he will return soon."

"Hope so, too," said Happy. "Want to sell birds, if he buy."

"I think father will take them, as he has guests to stay with him to-night. I am getting anxious for his return."

"Me ankshous, too," said Happy, with a grin. "White girl good. Happy remembers the bad fever and how she take care of him and give him good medicine. Happy never forget dat."

"It was nothing," she said. "You came to us sick and I did as I hope I shall always do when a man sick or in trouble comes to me for help."

"Happy poor Injun," he said, laying his hand upon his heart, "but him all good here when he looks at white girl, Nettie."

Happy had come to the cabin one day ill with a fever contracted in the swamps. Nettie had given him medicine and watched him with sisterly care until he was quite recovered.

"I hear footsteps," she said, suddenly, lifting her hand for silence. Happy nodded and winked knowingly as an uncertain, wavering step approached the door.

"Man drunk!" he said, briefly. "Too much fire-water."

As he spoke the body of a man fell against the door. It opened inward, and the person fell headlong into the room. Nettie uttered a low cry of horror, for it was Harry Sander-son who lay still and pale at her feet.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE CELLAR.

"MAN drunk?" said Happy, in a questioning tone, rising quickly and looking into the face of the senseless man. "No; man *hurt*! white girl bring water, quick!"

Nettie darted to the water-pail, but it was empty; catching it up she ran to the little spring just in the rear of the building, and filling it quickly, ran back to the house. Happy dipped the gourd into the pail and began to lave the face of the young stranger.

"Man hurt here," said the Indian, as he passed his hand over a bruised place upon the young man's forehead. "Some man hit him wid lightwood knob."

It must have been a terrible blow which could so completely rob those strong-knit sinews of their strength. But the cool water had its effect, and Harry began to show signs of returning consciousness.

"He should not have come here," whispered Nettie, "but oh, how can I send him away when he is so badly hurt!"

"He stay here; fadder cure him," said Happy Bill.

"No, no; Conrad Thurston is with him, and he hates this young man. He must be moved, but where can he be taken?"

"Ugh!" said Happy. "Me take care of him same as white girl take care Happy. Open door; me carry him to wood-but!"

"It looks wicked to send him away," she murmured. "I could watch him so much better than Happy. Yet he must go. Wait until I give you some liquor."

"No want him," said Happy Bill, gravely. "No like him at all."

"It is not for yourself, Happy; but when a man is so weak, liquor sometimes makes him strong," she said.

"See," said Happy Bill, laying his hand upon her arm, "Happy Bill was a chief of the Sioux. He loved fire-water, and it made him a dog, and then his people drove him out

from among them and made him wander in a strange country. Happy swore by the Manitou that he would never touch fire-water again, and he will not."

"A good resolution, Happy," said Nettie, earnestly. "I hope you will keep it always."

"Yes; Happy keep it," he said, gravely. "When he promises the Manitou, his words are good. He will not forget."

They were interrupted by Harry Sanderson, who sat up, with a struggle, and looked wildly about him.

"Where am I?" he gasped.

"You are safe for the present," said Annette; "but you must not stay here or I will not answer for your life."

"My life! Ah, I remember, now. We were attacked in the woods, and I was struck by a low branch and knocked out of the saddle. After that I remember little."

"You must go away at once," cried Annette. "Hasten, or you may be too late; for, if the men come back, I should have no power over them. Go with the Indian—a man whom you can trust with your life."

Happy Bill passed his strong arm under the shoulders of Sanderson and raised him to his feet. As he did so, they heard the confused sound of voices close at hand, and the tramp of feet. Quick as thought, Nettie sprung to the door and dropped the bar in its place, for she knew that Harry could not now escape without being seen. For a moment she stood in doubt, and then raising a trap-door, she pointed downward into a small, dark cellar.

"In here, for your life!" she gasped. "It is your only hope."

Harry did not hesitate, for something in her manner impressed him with the extremity of his danger, and he plunged into the dark opening without a word. Once in the cellar, he crouched in a corner behind some barrels, and calmly awaited the result. Happy closed the trap and sat down on it cross-legged, while Nettie lifted the bar which closed the door just as a hand was laid upon it, and four men came in with the manner of persons who felt quite at home. The first was Conrad Thurston, with Bill Brace and Jake Kilts—the two who had stopped Harry upon the road—and a mid-

dle-aged man, with a peculiar, yet handsome face. He wore a heavy whisker reaching to his breast, and his hair was of a dark iron-gray. The eyes were black, with a devilish expression in them, and there was a cold, cruel look about the mouth which would have impressed a stranger painfully. Anger was now stamped upon his face, but it passed away as he met the anxious glance of Annette.

"Ah, you are here, then, Annette?" he said, as he deposited his rifle and ammunition in a rack, and hung up his belt. "Confounded night to be tramping through the woods. How are you, Happy? I hope you have brought some game."

"Got plenty chicken," said Happy, pointing to the pile of birds in the corner. "You buy 'em, s'pose?"

"Yes, I'll take them all," replied the man, quietly. "Put up your weapons, boys. We have wasted our time to-night to no purpose—curse the luck!"

"I wanted to meet that Sanderson," said Thurston, with an oath; "but the devil was on his side, and he got off clear."

"It is your fault that we have any thing to fear from him," said the older man, sharply. "How could you be such a fool as to offer that pin for sale?"

"I think you have said enough about that," replied Thurston, sullenly. "Who would have suspected that this young fellow could know any thing about it? But Bill Brace threw him off the scent nicely—I will say that."

"Perhaps he was not so much cheated as you imagine," said the elder man, Richard Forbes, as he drew a stool up to the fire. "One of those cursed bullets grazed my leg. Where's the arnica-bottle, Nettie?"

The girl brought the required article, and he sat by the fire rubbing the part where the bullet had left a blue mark upon the cuticle, muttering to himself in an angry way.

"We are about played out here, boys," he broke out, at last; "and it is nearly time we made a move."

"I'm going to get even with old Selley and his friend Joe, first," protested Conrad, angrily. "That infernal trapper cleaned me out to-day, and I don't allow any one to walk off with my money in that way."

"Then don't brag on your shooting again," said Bill Brace. "I lost a cool fifty on you, this blessed day."

"I didn't think that Sanderson knew how to shoot," growled Conrad.

"Don't think there are no marksmen coming out of York State," said Bill. "There's a big tract of timber and lake country, they call the Shaddagee region, whar' they have pesky good shootin'. It served you right for bein' such a fool."

"There, there," said Forbes, interposing, as Conrad was about to make an angry reply. "Let us have no quarreling, but take a drink and let us talk business. Happy, I'm sorry to drive you out, but we've got something to talk about that we don't want you to hear. You won't mind sleeping in the shed, this warm weather?"

Happy arose. Forbes put into his hand the price of the chickens, and he started out, exchanging a meaning look with Nettie. But, as he neared the door, Bill Brace stopped him.

"Hold on, Happy," he said. "You're an Injun—that's what you ar'; but I've heerd say you bragged on bein' a sober man. Don't drink whisky, *you* don't!"

"No like him," said Happy, shortly, for he did not fancy Bill Brace.

"That's foolish, that is," continued the ruffian. "A man hain't no right, be he Injun or white, to fly in the face of a lovely creeter like whisky. It's the staff of life, whisky is."

"You lean on it pretty often," Thurston remarked, laughing; "better let the Indian alone."

"Don't interfere until I axes you," retorted Brace, who had already been drinking quite freely. "See yer, you red heathen, I'm Bill Brace, the great ontamed catamount of the Kansas plains. The wolverine of the North, I be."

"You *skunk*, mebbe," said Happy, quietly; "smell bad; poof!"

"W'a-a-a-t!" screamed Bill. "D'ye talk that way to the Big Unlicked?"

"You won't be the big unlicked long if you fool with that Indian," said Forbes, contemptuously. "Why can't you let him alone, Bill?"

"He's got to drink with me," roared Bill, snatching up a bottle. "I can't stand it that an Injun, a common red Injun,

should crow over me because he's a sober man. He's got to take one drink fur the honor of Kansas."

"But he does not wish to drink," spoke out Annette, sharply, "and you shall not force him to do so."

"Shan't, eh?" shouted Bill, with a wicked gleam in his eyes. "Now, see here, Injun, you grab holt of that 'ar' bottle and drink hearty or I'll jump you like a catamount. Bet yer everlastin' life!"

"Happy has said to the Manitou that he will not drink fire-water," replied the Indian, who had kept his temper nobly, putting the bottle aside. "Happy will not drink it."

"Once more, Injun; it's yer last chance. Will you drink?"

"No!" Bill Brace set the bottle upon the table and leaped like a tiger upon the Indian, who offered nothing save passive resistance. But even then, Brace could not move him from the stand he had taken. He tugged, strained and blasphemed, while Happy stood calmly in his tracks with a smile upon his face. Angry at this, Brace lifted his hand and struck the Indian in the face. Happy staggered back, uttering a fierce exclamation, and then, recovering himself with an effort, waved the ruffian back.

"No strike again or me kill," he hissed through his clenched teeth. But, Bill Brace advanced with his hand drawn back for another blow, when Happy caught him by the shoulder and waist and flung him to the floor with a violence which shook the house. The Sioux knew nothing of the rules which govern the art of self-defense. He had been taught that when you get an enemy down it is best to keep him there; so he leaped upon the prostrate man, caught him by the ears and began to bang his head against the floor until Brace roared for mercy. It is impossible to say what might have happened or how the fray would have resulted, if the friends of Brace had not dragged the Indian away, and the ruffian rose staggering and feeling for a knife. But Thurston and Forbes pinioned his arms.

"Don't hold me, cuss you!" he howled. "Didn't you see the Injun strike me?"

"You struck first," replied Forbes, "and the Indian would have gone away quietly if you had let him alone. There: go and sit down, or I shall use my authority."

Brace dropped upon a stool, his fierce eyes shooting malignant glances at the red-skin, who was now ready to depart.

"He let me alone—I let *him* alone," he said, as he opened the door. "Good-by, white girl: me come ag'in."

As the door closed upon him, Bill Brace caught up a rifle and made a sudden bound for the door. None of the men were watching him at the moment, and if he had reached the open air it would have gone hard with the innocent Indian. But Nettie, keenly anxious for her red friend, was on the watch, and slipped between him and the door before he could get out. Wild with passion, Bill caught her rudely and flung her aside, and had already laid his hand upon the door when he felt a circlet of cold iron pressed against his temple and heard the cold, icy voice of Forbes.

"Stand or you die!"

He stopped, trembling in every limb, for he knew too well the pitiless nature of the man who spoke. His courage forsook him on the instant, and he fell trembling upon his knees.

"Mercy, commander; mercy!" he screamed.

"What mercy do you deserve? It is such men as you, Bill Brace, who do so much to make our enterprise a failure. It would be better for us if I were to pull the trigger and send you home."

"Don't do it, commander," pleaded Brace. "I was crazy with drink—I was indeed, or I wouldn't have put a hand on the Injun."

"It is not that so much, you vile dog, but you have dared to lay your filthy hands upon Annette. I think I had better pull upon you."

"No, don't!" shrieked Brace. "Say something for me, Miss Nettie. Don't let him shoot me down in cold blood."

"Father," said Annette, "if you have any love for me, hold your hand."

"Crawl upon your hands and knees to her and beg her pardon," said Forbes, sternly. Brace dropped upon all-fours, a pitiable specimen of abject humility, and crept to Annette's feet and begged her forgiveness in the most piteous tones.

"Let him get up," said the girl. "But stop; promise me that you will not attempt to revenge yourself upon the Indian."

"I promise," said Brace; "I won't hurt him, I swear."

"That is enough : let him get up, father," said Annette, looking at the wretched man scornfully. Forbes replaced his pistol, and directing a look of deadly meaning at the crouching ruffian, permitted him to arise, which he did gladly.

"Go to your own room now, Annette," said Forbes. "We have something to talk of which we wish to keep to ourselves. No listening, mind."

"As if I wished to know any thing of your wicked plans," she said, in an almost savage tone. "I am willing to go."

But, she was not. She thought of Harry Sanderson in the cellar, and what would be his fate if he were detected. Already he had heard enough to doom him to death, if the vile party once suspected his presence.

"Have you every thing that you want here?" she said, striving to gain time.

"Yes, yes ;" replied Forbes, in a hurried tone. "Go out, and leave us alone."

She went out slowly into her room, which was partitioned off from the one in which they sat. The men drew a table to the other side of the room, placed bottles and glasses upon it, and began to talk in subdued tones which did not reach Annette's ears. Forbes appeared to be the leading spirit. When he spoke the rest gave strict attention and no one presumed to contradict him with the exception of Conrad, who did so at times, but was rewarded by a look of cold surprise, for Forbes brooked no opposition to his will.

Annette was in agony. She could think of nothing which could possibly take any of them into the cellar that night, yet something *might* happen. She watched the faces of the party through the chinks in the boards and knew that they were plotting some great wickedness. All at once her father arose and spoke so that she could hear him.

"To do this, Conrad, you will want more money, and that I will give you, to account for to the Night-hawks. Annette, where is the lantern?"

"Why do you want it?"

"I must go into the cellar," he said. "I keep a little money always on hand, as you know, boys. Bring the lantern, Nettie."

To go into the cellar! Her knees trembled beneath her,

and when she came out into the room the men were startled by the frightful pallor of her face.

"Why, Nettie," said Conrad, "what is the matter, my dear? You are as pale as a ghost."

"She has not got over the shock the other night, when the great pine was struck by lightning, and Bill Brace has handled her roughly, too. I've a good mind—"

"Don't say any more about it, father," said Annette, as she prepared the lantern. "Let me get the box for you."

"No," he said, "I will not allow you to exert yourself."

"But I am not sick, father," she said, earnestly. "Pray let me get it for you."

"Nonsense; give me the lantern."

He stepped to the trap-door, and Annette held her breath as she saw him grasp the ring and raise the wooden door. Some horrible attraction led her to follow her father and to cast a wild look after him as he went down, step by step.

He advanced slowly, for the place was very dark, but as yet she had seen nothing of Harry, and she was about to stumble against her father and extinguish the light in his hands, when he took a few quick steps across the cellar, and put his hand upon a stone in the wall.

"Come and hold the light," he said sharply, turning to her. She advanced, and held the light in such a way, that, while it shone upon the stone upon which he was working, it did not throw any light behind her. He worked for a moment at the loose stone, when it came out suddenly, and revealed a small cavity in the wall, into which he thrust his hand and brought out a small tin-box, which he opened, took out a roll of bills, and closed it again. At this moment Nettie managed to extinguish the light.

"There, you have done it now," he said, in a petulant tone. "However, there is light enough, for what I have to do."

He put back the box, replaced the stone, and led the way to the cellar stairs.

While there, Annette had been in an agony, for she had expected nothing less than a deadly combat between her father and the hidden man, and she could not doubt who would be the victor in such a contest. Added to this,

she loved her father, bad and cruel as he was, and would not willingly see him injured. She breathed more freely then, when he turned toward the stairs.

She was surprised that the young man had been able to keep out of sight in the small cellar. Even she who knew of his presence, had not been able to catch a glimpse of him, and as the trap-door was closed, she puzzled herself in endeavoring to study out the place where he lay concealed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MADMAN.

As Forbes closed the trap, Annette looked up and caught the eyes of Conrad Thurston fixed upon her, in a strange, questioning way, with something of malice in it. He had been asking himself the question, whether or not there was any *reason* for her excessive pallor beyond the fright of the night before, and his suspicions became aroused. She averted her face quickly, but not before he caught the troubled expression on it.

"I want to speak to you, Annette," he said, rising from the table; "come out here a moment."

He threw open the door of the house, and made a signal to her to pass out, which she did at once, but the look of anxiety deepened on her face.

"Now, my dear girl," he said, when they moved some paces from the door, "I want to ask you a question. *Who is concealed in the cellar?*"

It was a random shot, but it told. The girl started and uttered a low cry.

"Ha! Then there is some one there!" he cried, fiercely, grasping her arm. "Who is it? Speak quickly, for by all the devils out of the pit I will know."

"Let go my arm," she replied, swinging herself clear of him by a sudden movement, "you had better be careful how you put your hands on me, Mr. Conrad Thurston."

"You little spit-fire!" hissed Thurston, with a bitter laugh. "Come, this will not do; tell me who is in the cellar, or it will be the worse for him."

"I don't know what you have conjured up in your crazy brain," she replied, indignantly. "What do you mean?"

"Do you deny that some one is there?" he asked.

"Why should I deny it?" she answered. "You stand ready to give me the lie, and so I shall neither deny nor affirm it. Do as you like."

"You are hard on a poor fellow," he said, in a mournful tone. "You know that I love you, and I am jealous of all other men on earth, and yet you delight in giving me pain. Say that the cellar is empty, and I will believe you."

"Why do you talk?" she replied, impatiently. "Was not father in the cellar within five minutes?"

"True, but the light went out, and I suppose that you held it; a rather suspicious circumstance, it seems to me."

"I told you that you would contradict me," she said, angrily. "There, go about your business, but don't take the trouble to talk to me, for I shall not answer."

"That is a pretty way to speak to a man who is to be your husband," he said, sullenly.

"I don't know that," was the reply. "If I am to be crossed in every thing I say, I would sooner die, than be your wife, and I do not think my father would *force* me to marry you."

"You had better tell me what I ask," he said. "Is it Sedley—Joe Bagley—Jim? You will not speak. Is it Sanderson? By all the devils it *is*!"

He suddenly flung open the door of the house, and shouted to those within:

"We are betrayed! and by this mad girl. There is a man in the cellar, and I think it is Sanderson."

All the rest started up and grasped their weapons. Annette's first impulse was to seize a weapon and defend the entrance to the cellar, but she had great discretion and force of will, and burst into a fit of laughter.

"Conrad has found out a wonderful thing, father," she said. "If there is a man in the cellar, as I do not believe, it was very possible for him to conceal himself there while I

was in the woods. There, go and search, and if you find any thing, come and tell me."

"She so kept up the appearance of delight in the foolishness of Thurston that even he began to doubt, and she hoped that no search would be made, but Forbes caught up the lantern which had been relighted and went into the cellar, followed by the rest, each with a cocked pistol in his hand.

"Knives will do," said Forbes, in a blood-chilling tone, looking over his shoulder. "Put up your pistols, boys."

They obeyed without a word of comment, and he held up the light, which shone into every corner of the little cellar. Two or three casks, a pile of vegetables, and a heap of straw, was all it contained.

"I think you have found a mare's nest, Con," said Forbes, looking back at the young man. "Kick over that straw, Bill; perhaps he is under that."

Bill Brace jumped on the straw and scattered it in every direction. But the effort was useless; there was nothing underneath. Annette, who was looking down through the trap, laughed aloud at their discomfiture.

"It is comical, my poor Con," she said, "but you brought it on yourself by your absurd suspicions. Are you going to stay there all night?"

Her laughter had its effect, and perhaps they did not search as carefully as they might have done if she had kept quiet. But, the place did not seem to contain any thing large enough to shelter a rat, and with an angry exclamation Forbes ordered the men out of the place.

"We have had enough of this foolishness," he said, as the trap was again closed. "There is the money, Con; take it and go about the work I have given you to do. Take Bill Brace with you, and see if you can control your tongues. And Bill—"

"Yes, commander."

"If I hear that any harm has come to Happy, your namesake, I shall lay it to your charge."

Bill said nothing, but there was a dark look upon his face.

"You don't give a man half a chance, commander," he said, slowly. "It's all right, though; I won't dare to tech him if you ar' so sot ag'inst it."

The two men went out, and shortly after were heard to take their horses and ride away. Then Jake Kilts departed upon a mission of his own, and no one remained in the house except Richard Forbes and his daughter.

"There is a strange look in your face, child," he said. "Have you been quarreling with Conrad?"

"Yes; he accused me of hiding some one in the cellar."

"He is very foolish, but then you must bear in mind that he loves you dearly, and that you are to be his wife."

"Father, I cannot bear the thought. I do not love Conrad Thurston, and I fear that I never can. There is something in his dark face which repels me, and when I think of him as my husband, I shudder—why, I cannot tell."

"You must not think of him in that way, my dear girl. There are worse men in the world than Thurston, and he loves you truly. But come; have you prepared the basket of provisions as I told you?"

"Yes, father."

"Then get it out while I bring up my horse. You will be quite alone for the greater part of the night, but bar the doors and windows and keep a rifle handy. You know how to use it, if there is any danger, as well as the best."

While he went out to the shed to bring up his horse, she opened her bedroom door and dragged out a large wicker basket, with a cloth carefully covering the top. In a moment her father was at the door, mounted.

"Bring me the basket, my dear," he said.

She raised it with both hands and found it quite as much as she could do to lift it to him as he sat in the saddle. He placed the basket on the pommel in front of him, and kept it there with one hand.

"Good night, my dear," he said; be careful and lock up the house before you retire."

She kissed her hand to him and he rode away at a brisk trot, taking a course which led him deeper and deeper into the ranges. He was soon in a section which was broken into gullies and ravines, a desolate, barren tract which no man choosing land would care to look at for a second time.

After riding about three miles through a broken and dangerous path, he turned sharply to the left and entered a little

valley containing, at the most, five or six acres of land. Upon the western side was a small cabin, built up against the rocks in such a way as to shelter it from the wind. He looked cautiously about him to see that he was not observed, and seeing no one, rode up to the door and rapped upon it sharply with the hilt of his knife. There was a stir within, and a gruff voice cried:

"Who is there? Ride on your way if a stranger. No one comes in here."

"It is I, Karl," replied Forbes. "Open the door."

The rough door swung back, and a dark figure appeared at the entrance, shading his eyes with his hands.

"Ah, commander; glad to see you, I am. It's mighty lonesome even for me back here in the ranges. If it wasn't good pay, you'd never keep me here."

"Take the basket," replied Forbes. "Careful; there's crockery in it."

The man took the basket and went into the hut, and Forbes, with a lariat from his saddle, picketed the horse a short distance from the door. This done, he entered the cabin and advanced to the fire.

The man he called Karl was leaning over the basket, removing the contents. He was a rough, hard-featured man, with a month's growth of stubble on his chin, and small, twinkling, ferocious eyes. In stature he was rather below the middle height, but he made up for it by a tremendous breadth of shoulder and girth of loins. A terrible man to meet in a deadly grapple for life or death, if outward appearance were any thing. Forbes drew a chair to the fire, and spread out his hands over the blaze, for the night air at that hour was quite chilly.

"How do we get on here, Karl?" he asked.

"How? The devil! If you only knew how much he tries my patience. Sometimes I gits so cussid mad I want to split him, but what's the use; the critter don't know how mean and ornery he is."

"It's a hard life for him, Karl," said Forbes, reflectively. "He ought to give up and then it would be all right. I never saw so obstinate a brute in my life."

"Obstinate! It ain't no name for it, commander. He's

pizen, he is! If it wasn't such a big stake, I'd say split him, and plant him some'rs or other. He ain't no right to wear the life out of honest men."

Karl had pursued a life of crime so long that he actually regarded himself as *honest*; but Forbes smiled in spite of himself. A moment after his face became stern again.

"Is he any calmer than he was, Karl?" he asked.

"Sometimes; an' then ag'in he'll take a streak of mean actin', an' you orter hear him rave and tear. It ain't jest safe to go in whar' he is, them times. Say, did ye bring me my whiskey?"

"There is a bottle in the basket."

"Yes, I seed it, but I thort it was fur *him*. 'Tain't right to waste good licker on his sort, nohow you can fix it."

He drew out the bottle and held it up between him and the light of the fire, laughing as it flashed in the light.

"Ah, the critter!" he said. "How I love it! Whisky, to the poor man, is as good as money, fur it makes him richer than the richest. When I'm drunk, I'm a king; when I'm sober, I'm nobody but old Karl Peugh, a miserable critter, tryin' to git an honest living."

"Where is the key?" said Forbes. "While you enjoy your liquor, I'll go in and see him. Perhaps he may change his mind when he sees me."

"Ain't got much mind left," rejoined Karl, lowering the bottle as he spoke. "It looks a little hard sometimes, but men must live. The key hangs by the door."

Forbes went to the place indicated, and took down a large iron key which hung there. Selecting a pitch-pine knot from a heap in the corner, he lighted it at the fire and went out at a door at the back of the cabin which opened inward, showing a rocky wall behind. There was a small hole in the rock in which he inserted the iron key and a sharp click was heard, followed by the swinging back of a portion of the rock. He entered, and the door closed behind him.

"That door was well planned," he said; "no one would for a moment suspect its presence. Now for my ancient prisoner."

His course led through a narrow excavation, just wide enough to admit the passage of a man's body, ending at

another door which he opened by touching a spring. As the door swung back his ears were assailed by the rattling of chains and a ferocious, scarcely human, yell, at which even he started back in affright. But he recovered himself and entered the room, which was a small one, hewn out of the solid rock.

Its only occupant was a strange, half-human creature, heavily chained to the wall, the last link being welded into an iron belt about the body. This being, whoever or whatever it was, had something of the impress of humanity. Its clothing was dirty and soiled, as if from contact with the dirty straw which formed his bed. The beard, which was white as snow, hung nearly to his waist, and his hair, of the same color, flowed about his shoulders in silvery masses. The creature was gamboling like a beast upon the straw which formed his bed, and, as if appalled by the lighted torch, he sunk down in a corner, gibbering like a maniac, as indeed he was.

"Now, keep quiet," said Forbes, sternly. "No tricks, sir. I have come to talk to you, and if you do not answer me when I speak, beware of the fire."

The maniac uttered a shriek of terror, and shrunk closer to the wall, while Forbes waved the light up and down before his eyes.

"Take it away!" screamed the poor wretch. "It burns my eyes, and I hate it as I hate you. Take it away."

Forbes smiled grimly and placed the burning knot in a small shelf in the rocky wall of the room, evidently cut for the purpose. The eyes of the maniac followed him all the time with a strange glare, in which the desire for revenge seemed to struggle with his fear of his jailor.

"Take care," said Forbes, noting this look. "The fire, my lad—the fire. You ought to know how it feels by this time."

"Don't touch me with it," screamed the maniac. "I don't like it, though I hate you all the same, you dog. Why do you keep me here? Outside the leaves are green and the birds sing. I used to hear them, long ago, before I came here to live. Why don't they sing now? Curse you, have you killed them all and chained their bodies down as you have mine?"

"It was a bad day for you, my good friend, when you tracked me down," said Forbes, grimly. "I told you so at the time, but you would not believe me. Better far for you to endure the little wrong I did you than to come to this."

"I am not right in my head, I think," muttered the madman, with a dim perception of his state. "I wish you would let me go out where the sun can shine upon me."

"Stop," said Forbes, taking a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket, and rapidly scrawling some words. "What am I doing now?"

"Ha! I know—I know," cried the madman. "You are *writing*; I could write once."

"See if you can write," said Forbes, throwing the pencil and paper to him. He crouched in the straw and wrote, in a free, bold hand, a name, at the sight of which Forbes uttered a cry of joy. "He has not forgotten," he muttered. "Now, if I can make him sign the deed, all will be well."

CHAPTER VII.

SANDERSON AND NETTIE.

TEN minutes had scarcely passed after the departure of Richard Forbes, when the trap-door was lifted and Harry Sanderson, looking rather the worse for mud and water, came quickly out of the cellar. He had now quite recovered from the effect of the blow he had received, and moved with the agility and grace of a muscular man. He met the delighted gaze of Annette by one of rapture.

"You noble girl!" he said, quickly. "You have saved my life."

"Then we are quits," she said, extending her hand. "A life for a life; that is equal."

"Are they gone, sure?" he said, looking anxiously about him. "I thought I was doomed when the trap was opened the first time."

"Where were you then?"

"I was under the straw," he replied.

"Ah! But you were not under the straw the second time, for Bill Brace searched there."

"No, indeed; but they leaned against my place of refuge several times. You remember the large cask in the corner. The head was out, so, on the spur of the moment, I turned it over and went under it. What chance had I if they had thought of looking there?"

"Father did not believe that you were in the cellar at all, and that accounts in part for the casual search which was made. But come; you must not stay here, for some of the men might come."

"Who are these men?" said Harry. "Their purpose is not good—that I know—but what are they doing here? Are they the Night-hawks?"

"You forget that my father is one of them," said Annette, sadly.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Forbes," he said. "I did not think that I was asking a child to betray her father. I repeat that I beg your pardon."

"There is no need," she answered, taking up her hat. "Come with me and I will set you on the road to Sedley's. Once there, I beg you to take your horse and ride away, never to return to this part of Kansas."

"I cannot do that," he replied, half fiercely. "I too have a mission, and will carry it through to the end."

She said no more and he followed her out of the house and down the bridle-path to the main road, where she halted. It was near the spot where the blasted pine yet stood as a monument of their former meeting. The tears came into her beautiful eyes, and he saw them glisten in the moonlight.

"We part here," she said, in a mournful tone, "never more to see each other's faces upon this side of the grave. But, I ask your good opinion; I want you to believe that, in spite of the associations with which I am connected, I am not wicked. If my father would quit this life and go away to a new country to repent the evils he has done in this, I should be very happy."

"You have no right to say that we shall never more meet," he protested; "we *shall* meet again."

"No, no ; it is better that we part here—better for you—better for me. I have lived so long among lawless men that it is a breath from heaven to hear the voice of an honest man, and to know that he is my friend. There, your course is plain before you. Sedley's house is the first on the *right-hand* side, about a mile distant."

"I cannot part from you like this," he said, taking her hand. "Do you think, for a moment, I can believe, after I have proved the goodness of your heart, that you have any sympathy with the cruel men with whom your lot is cast? Not I, by heaven! And then I wish to speak to you of Thurston. Beware of him, for he has a wicked heart."

"Do I not know it?" she cried, wildly. "But I am in the toils and cannot escape. Go your way and think of me sometimes as one who, in another sphere, might have been a good and happy woman. Good-by—for ever!"

She darted away before he could stretch out a hand to detain her as he would have done, and he pursued his way along the lonely road under the light of the moon, now riding high and clear in the sky. His thoughts were all of Annette—of her beauty—of her many graces and the nobleness of heart she had shown. Buried in these reflections, he was startled suddenly by the sound of horses' feet, and before he could bury himself in the woods, two horsemen were close to him, whom he recognized at once as Thurston and Brace.

"Ha!" yelled Thurston, "'tis Sanderson! After him, Bill Brace; a hundred dollars if we run him down!"

Harry was unarmed, and his only safety was in flight. Darting aside from the road, he plunged into the woods, threading his way with inconceivable rapidity through the intricacies of the forest. Brace and Thurston did not attempt to follow on horseback, but, flinging themselves from the saddle, and leaving the horses to find their way home, as the well-trained steeds would surely do, they darted into the woods in close pursuit, with their pistols ready. But they found that they followed a man who was no child in the tricks of the woods, and was a noble runner as well, for, strain as they would, it was impossible to gain upon him. Brace would have fired but he had discovered that Sedley

and his party were in the woods, and he had no wish for a personal encounter with the giant brothers. It was a fair race, and it was impossible to say who would win, when Harry, who knew nothing of the locality, came suddenly into an opening where a boy stood beside some horses. At a glance Harry recognized Jim Sedley.

"Hurrah!" yelled Jim. "Here you ar', Mr. Sander-son!"

Harry darted behind the horses and took breath, while Jim thrust into his hand a heavy knife. Thurston and Brace broke out of the bushes a hundred yards distant, but Jim drew a bead upon the leader.

"Git!"

It was all he said, but it was enough. The villains did not fear to cope with a tired man and a boy, but they feared that Sedley and his friends were not far off, and did not dare to wait. Turning swiftly, they darted into the bushes, followed by the derisive shouts of Jim Sedley.

"Yah-hip! Cowards — hoss-thieves! Why don't you run, you thieves of the world? Git up and dust!"

"It was a lucky thing for me that I came upon you, Jim," said Harry, drawing a long breath. "I was pretty tired and had no weapons."

"I'm glad I staid. We went back and got the two Fra-licks, and father and Joe are with 'em in the woods, trying to find you. I'll bet they've bin gone four hours. Let's see if I can bring them in."

He had a tin horn hanging at his saddle which he took down and sounded with all the power of his lungs. The sonorous blast went rolling away across the forest, and was echoed and reëchoed among the mossy trunks. Jim waited a moment and then a reply came back from the woods at least a mile away. He now blew three times in quick succession and was answered by a single blast.

"That's all right," said Jim. "He understands me and will come in. Lordy, the times I've sounded that call for him in the woods?"

They sat down to wait for the coming of their friends, who had a mile to walk through the dark forest to reach them. But these men of the border are swift of foot and

it was not long before the form of Joe Bagley appeared closely followed by Sedley and the two giant brothers. Joe uttered a shout of joy and executed a fantastic hornpipe as he saw Harry sitting upon a mossy knoll.

"Hyar he is, by the livin' hokies! Oh, ain't it gay? I never was so glad sence I was born. Hold me somebody or I'll bu'st up, sure."

Mr. Sedley advanced and shook the young man warmly by the hand and introduced the two brothers, Dan and Pat Fralick.

"The bist av good luck til ye, misther!" said Pat. "It's the opinion av meself as well as me brither Dan that ye've had a moighty hard time av it."

"I have been in some danger," was the reply, "but I welcome it if it brings me such warmed-hearted friends. Have you been looking for me ever since I was lost, Joe?"

"Yes, and what's more, we'd 'a' kept it up all night; and what's more'n that, we'd 'a' looked till mornin'—and arter that till sundown; and ef we didn't find ye then I'd 'a' had the scalp of any mushrat-eating, hoss-stealing, carrotty-headed son of a gun like Bill Brace, if we chained to meet."

"If you had been here, half an hour ago, you would have had the pleasure of meeting the worthy, as he with his friend Thurston chased me through the woods until I stumbled on Jim here, when they beat a somewhat hasty retreat," said Harry.

"Bad luck til them," roared Pat. "Av I had them here now!"

Harry now recounted the manner of his downfall, and said nothing of the place in which he had been concealed, as he felt that he was not doing right in betraying the father of Annette. But he said that she had put him upon the right road.

"She's a good gal, is Nettie," said Joe. "And purty! She ain't got her ekal in all Kansas ef I do say it. But, why in thunder she sticks to that old rip, Dick Forbes, I don't know."

"Who is Dick Forbes?"

"The devil only knows, fur I don't. He's the father of the gal who helped you, and a cold-blooded cruel old rip he

is too. We suspect him of a good many things, but what's the use of suspecting when you can't *prove* any thing. I'll ketch him asleep one of these days, and when I *do*, good-by to him—that's all."

"What is his business?"

"Purtends to keep a tavern, but, what's the use of a tavern, half a mile away from the main track? No one goes thar 'cept a lot of gallows-birds that ain't got no great while to stay in Kansas. But, let's git home; it's jest foolin' away time staying here."

They set off at a swinging pace, and quickly reached the house of the Irish brothers, who invited them in warmly.

"Come in, the heft av ye!" said Pat. "We've got blankets in plenty, an' a small sup av the crayther for our fri'nds."

"I'd like to stop, Pat," said Mr. Sedley, "but you see my wife will be anxious, and I must go on."

"I'll stay with you, boy," said Joe Bagley, "and Mr. Sanderson had better stop too, because your wife won't be ready for him, Sam."

Harry insisted upon staying, and after some persuasion the father and son departed, and the Irishmen led their guests into the cabin.

"Dhraw up stools, boys, and make yersilves at home," said Dan, hospitably. "It's little we can offer yees, but, afther the run we've had, a small taste av the crayther an' a bit to ate won't come so bad. Rake up the fire, Pat."

While Pat was raking out the coals, his brother cut some steaks from a venison ham which hung suspended from the ceiling and prepared them for broiling. Joe, who always made himself at home, prepared the coffee, and while Pat broiled the venison Dan drew out a rough pine table, and placed upon it such rude dishes as they possessed. A large black bottle graced the center of the board, but this was to be the crowning of the repast. The struggles of the night had given Harry a tremendous appetite, and when the meal was ready, although it was after twelve o'clock, he did ample execution upon the steaks and Johnnycake, washed down with two or three cups of strong coffee. Dan then cleared the table, and placed in the cenetr a steaming bowl of punch, a pack of cards, tobacco pipes and glasses.

"It's the first toime we iver had a jintleman from the States to ate wid us, an' be the powers we'll make a noight av it. Let me fill the glass for ye, Misther Sanderson. Sure it's mild as milk—an' moighty pleasant."

Harry laughed at the Irishman's idea of mildness as he tasted the punch and gave himself up to the rollicking good nature of his hosts. They played game after game until nearly three o'clock, when the punch waxing low, and Joe Bagley manifesting a disposition to dance upon the table, the party rose. At this moment the crack of firearms was heard in the direction of Sedley's cabin.

All started and looked at each other in dismay, when the rush of light feet was heard, the door was thrown open, and Happy Bill, panting as if from a hard run, stood in the room.

"Git guns, quick! Bad white man burn out Sedley," he gasped.

Every man sprung for his gun, and forgetting all else dashed away in the direction of Sedley's cabin, about which the crack of rifles was yet plainly heard.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DEADLY STRUGGLE.

MR. SEDLEY and Jim, upon entering their cabin home, were warmly greeted by Mrs. Sedley, who had been somewhat anxious when they did not appear after the vendue nor as the night wore on. She was a whole-souled, hearty woman, the wife for a man who wrought out with his own hard hands the necessaries of life.

"Ah, old man," she said, "I'm glad to see you. I was getting anxious, I tell you."

"Thought I was on a spree, didn't you, old lady?" said Sedley, with a gay laugh. "Never you fear for me! A man like me can't afford to drink, for I've got a boy growing up here, and I won't set him a bad example. He's done right

well to-night, Jim has, but he's too resky; I must say it—too resky."

"I didn't have no chance," said Jim. "Father left me to 'tend hosses while he had all the fun, and I don't like it."

"What have you been doing?" demanded Mrs. Sedley, anxiously. "Not fighting, I hope?"

"Wal, we did have a bit of a skrimmage, old girl. Not much fighting about it, 'cause we run like thieves, all on us. A gang of men pitched into us in the woods, and— Tell your mammy about it, Jim, while I give the animiles a feed."

The boy sat down by the fire, and, interrupted by exclamations of "The massy sakes alive," "do tell," and "who'd 'a' thought it?" recounted to his mother the adventures of the night. She was terribly excited, for, woman-like, she feared a hidden enemy more than an open one.

"We know two of 'em, anyhow," said Jim; "Bill Brace and Con Thurston, and it won't do for them to linger too long in this section or some of 'em will stretch a rope, sure. I'm mortal hungry, mammy; I wish you'd kinder hurry up the grub."

The good woman bustled about, and soon had the table spread, and placed upon it the provisions she had kept warm before the fire. Father and son sat down and made a hearty meal, never even pausing to answer the questions of the mother.

It was after one o'clock when Mr. Sedley put up the bars on the doors and windows, and retired to rest. The cabin had been built in the days when Indian attacks might be feared, and would resist a strong assault. The loft was provided with loopholes for rifles, and presented a solid double wall of heavy logs to beat back the rifle-balls. In the dead of night, Mr. Sedley was aroused by a sharp rap at the door, and he sprung out of bed, partly dressed himself, and went to the door.

"Who is there?" he demanded.

"Let me in and I'll tell you," replied a harsh voice. "I want to talk to you."

"Want must be your *master*, if you can't give a better rea-

son than that," replied Sedley. "Trot away on the legs natur' has given you or I'll put a bullet through you."

"Don't crow that way, Sam Sedley!" replied the man outside. "You'd better open the door; it will be all the better for you."

"See here, old lady," whispered Mr. Sedley, "pass my rifles and ammunition up to Jim, and get into the loft yourself. If these ain't robbers and boss-thieves, I don't want a red cent."

Mrs. Sedley had lived too long upon the border to be very much excited. With a coolness which would have done credit to a veteran soldier, she collected the rifles and ammunition and passed them up to Jim, who was on hand, delighted at the prospect of a muss. By this time the applicant for admission was getting clamorous and was pounding on the door with the butt of a pistol.

"Now, look here, my friend," said Sedley, in a threatening voice, "I don't want any trouble with a man I don't know; but if you've got a boss, you mout as well climb on him and get away pretty quick, because I'm liable to shoot, any minnit."

"Oh, dry up—do!" replied the man outside. "We ain't the kind of chickens to scare easy, and we want you to open this door."

"Can you see him, Jim?" whispered Sedley, looking up at his son in the loft.

"Yes."

"How many can you see?"

"I count ten from here. They've tied their beasts by the edge of the road and are coming this way. Every man carries a rifle, and I kin see pistols, too."

"I'm glad the moon shines," said Sedley. "We'll mark some of the thieves down, as sure as fate."

"Are ye going to open this yer door?" snarled the man outside.

"Jim, stand ready," whispered Sedley. "Draw a bead on him, and when I count five shoot him through the shoulder. Don't kill him if you can help it." Then to the man at the door: "No, I ain't going to open that door."

"Then well bu'st it in," roared the scoundrel.

"I'm going to count five," said the borderer; "and it will be healthy for you to git away from that door before I git done. One!"

"I'll make you sweat for this."

"Two!"

"I'll hev yer skulp, by the mortal—"

"Three!"

"Yer kain't skeer me—what's the use? I ain't one of them 'ar fel—"

"Four!"

"Oh, count away till yer breath gives out."

"Five!"

Crack! Jim's rifle exploded the instant the word dropped from his father's lips, and the ruffian outside uttered a yell of agony and clapped his hand to his shoulder, from which the blood was bubbling. Jim was a good shot, and had been looking along the brown barrel of the rifle while his father counted, waiting anxiously for the last word. Sam Sedley ran up the little ladder which led to the loft and drew it after him. This done, he closed the trap, stepped rapidly to one of the loopholes and fired at the advancing party. One of them threw up his arms and dropped heavily to the earth.

"Mebbe that'll skeer them," he said, coolly. "We ain't going to be routed out of our own shanty."

While he was reloading his rifle the enemy dropped out of sight, crouching behind every thing which could afford them shelter.

"Hold on," cried one. "Hullo, in the house, what ar' ye shooting at?"

"You'll find out mighty soon if you don't pick up your truck and clear," roared Sedley. "Come—git out!"

"We want our friend."

"Waal, you won't git him," said the borderer. "I want to see him, and when I know his face, like enough we kin find out who his friends are. A man is known by the company he keeps, and *vice versa*."

No reply was made, but the enemy began to creep up by slow approaches from all sides, covering themselves from the shots of the father and son by means of every object in the line of the house. In that uncertain, wavering light, it is not

wonderful that the defenders did not succeed in disabling any more of their assailants, though several received slight wounds.

The whole party was soon ensconced under the wall of the cabin, in such positions that it was impossible to fire at them. Yet they were in a perilous situation, for the watchful eyes above were busy, and if one of the assailants showed a finger it became the mark of a bullet.

"This is rough on us," whispered one of the men. "Why not take the horses and put out? We can lay out Sedley some other time."

"He knows too much," was the reply, "and for our safety he must go down. See if you can't get your knife under that shutter, Jack."

But, the strong oaken shutters resisted their united efforts and they began to realize that they had put their heads into the jaws of the lion without getting his permission to take them out again. Something must be done, and that quickly, for the sound of rifles might bring assistance to the besieged. The men collected near the door and aimed their rifles at the same spot and fired together. Eight balls pierced the door just above the heavy bar which secured it, and it required only a few strokes of a bowie to make an opening large enough to admit a man's hand and arm. A moment more and the door was thrown open and the wild band trooped in.

They were all clad in buck-skin, and wore masks which completely concealed their features from the gaze of the assailed, who were unable to identify a single man in the party.

"Now, Sam Sedlley," cried a voice evidently disguised, "we want you, so you may as well come down. You've shot two of the boys, and you've got to answer for it."

"I'll shoot another of the boys if I git a bead on him," replied Sedley, changing his position the moment he had spoken. A dozen pistol-balls passed through the garret floor where he had stood a moment before.

"Are you going to yield?" demanded the leader. "Speak quick, for we have no time to waste."

"Not a bit of it!"

"You've got your wife and boy up there," said the speaker. "Think before you consign them to a horrible death."

"You wouldn't hurt a woman," cried Sedley, anxiously. "Come, I don't think so mean of you as that."

"We won't hurt her or the boy if you give up, Sam," replied the spokesman. "We've got to have *you*."

"Don't listen to him, father," whispered Jim. "They'd kill you, and we might as well die here. Oh, if Joe Bagley and Mr. Sanderson had only come home with us."

"They may hear the shooting and come out," said the father, hopefully. "D'ye hear, down there? we ain't going to give up."

He had placed his wife in angle of the loft directly over the little bed-chamber, where she was safe from the bullets which the villains began to send through the floor, thick and fast. But, although they flew close to the brave father and son, not one touched a mark. Jim listened intently, and then fired his rifle through the floor. A loud scream of pain from below told him that the shot had found a mark. Encouraged by this, Mr. Sedley discharged his weapon with a like result.

"Curse them!" roared a voice below; "they won't give up; let's burn 'em out!"

The cruel proposition was hailed with delight by the ruffian band, who began to collect combustible material upon the floor of the cabin. Beds and bedding were thrown in one great heap, but the leader stayed the hand which would have thrown a brand upon the pile.

"Once more, Sam Sedley," he cried, "I give your wife a chance for her life. The boy has sealed his own fate and must go with you. Will you two yield if the woman is allowed to go free?"

"Yes, yes," cried Sedley, eagerly; "will you promise that she shall be allowed to go, and that no man shall lay a finger on her?"

"Yes, yes."

"Hold on!" cried the clear voice of Mrs. Sedley. "Do you think I will trust such villains as that? What is their word good for? No, if we've got to die let us die together, in the name of God."

"My dear wife," said the borderer, "you may be right—I am afraid you are—but I can't bear to throw away a chance to save your life."

"There is no chance to save life and honor," she said, hoarsely. "It is in God's hands, my husband; let us die nobly, if we must."

"That's the talk!" spoke up Jim. "We won't give up to them."

Sedley was infected by the heroism of his wife and boy. Not that he lacked bravery, but his desire to save her had made him forget the character of the men below. His indecision was over now, and he caused Jim to load the rifles carefully and to stand ready. This done, he suddenly flung open the trap and snatched his rifle from the hand of his wife. Before he could fire, the man who held the brand fell, shot through the heart by Jim, whose aim was deadly. Then the other rifle cracked and a second man measured his length upon the floor. With a hoarse cry of rage the leader of the robber band caught the brand from the hand of the dead and flung it upon the heap which at once sprung into a blaze, and the assailants retreated to the outside and formed a circle about the house with their rifles cocked.

"Now, then, we have them," cried the masked leader; "not one of them shall escape."

Indeed, they seemed to be doomed. The character of the material of which the heap was composed was such that it at once sprung into a bright flame which streamed up to the floor of the cabin loft in which the victims stood. There was an ax in the loft, and, grasping it with both hands, the brave borderer broke open the roof, and made a space wide enough to admit the passage of a human body. In this opening he placed the ladder which had formed the means of access to the loft, and ordered his wife to go up on the roof where she would be out of danger for the present.

"Good heavens, lieutenant," said one of the assailing party. "Let's save the woman; I can't stand it."

"Keep back!" replied the leader, fiercely. "Do not dare to take a step to her rescue, for she must go with the rest now. I have no doubt that Sam has told her every thing."

Mrs. Sedley was now standing on the roof in full view, and she stretched out her hands in a gesture of proud defiance. Her husband followed her, showing himself boldly upon the roof, for in his present desperate strait, he preferred

death by the bullet to death in the flames. He shook his clenched hand threateningly at his enemies. Jim in a moment was also on the roof, and stood with folded arms looking out upon the space lighted up by the fire.

"It's no use talking," said the man who had proposed saving Mrs. Sedley; "they are game to the core, and will die so."

The fire was spreading rapidly, and was already attacking the roof upon which they stood. The doomed family had given up hope, and Sam Sedley openly defied his enemies to fire.

"Aim at my breast, cowards and dogs as you are," he screamed. "I am ready to die, since it is the will of God. Shoot, if you dare!"

Not a hand was lifted, and the red flame shot up through the opening which had been made in the roof, and shed a strange mellow light upon the scene. Mrs. Sedley did not blench, but Jim, thinking always of the possibilities, dragged the ladder out of the fire and laid it upon the roof, near the eaves. The villains stood appalled at the stern resolution of their victims, when the rush of hurrying feet startled them, and a rifle shot brought down one of their number. The doomed family looked up, and by the light of the burning dwelling, saw Happy Bill calmly reloading his rifle, while Sanderson, Joe and the two Irishmen were coming up rapidly.

"Hooray!" yelled Jim; "lay low, father! By the mighty snakes we are saved!"

The assailants did not hesitate. There was a hurried rush for the horses, and mounting in hot haste, away they went at full speed, while Jim and his father hastily placed the ladder and assisted Mrs. Sedley, nearly fainting with joy, to the ground. Jim caught up his rifle which was yet loaded and pointed it after the flying horsemen, but the distance and the wavering light made his aim uncertain, and they thundered down the road, just as the rescue party, panting for breath, but with joyful faces, rushed up to the spot. They had not come too soon.

CHAPTER IX.

HAPPY ON A SCOUT.

Two of the dead ruffians lay upon the sod where they had fallen—one of them the man who had been shot through the shoulder by Jim at the very beginning of the affray. They went up to him, as he lay upon his back, and found that he had a second wound, and the one which had caused his death—a knife-wound in the breast!

"See that," said Joe Bagley. "This yer chap was hurt, and they was afraid he'd spit out what he know'd, and so they knifed him. That is what I call kussid mean."

It was true; the man was too badly hurt to move, and one of the ruffians had stabbed him to the heart sooner than take any chances of betrayal.

"That's enough for me," said Joe Bagley, fiercely. "That kind of men can't stay in Kansas now, you bet your life. It's full time the Vigilantes took a hand in this game, and I'm the boy to start 'em."

He tore the mask from the face of the dead man and looked at him by the light of the burning house.

"Jack Rutt," he said. "A most dirty villain, too, he is, and desarves any fate, no matter how bad. Who is the other?"

Dan pulled the mask from the face of the second dead man, and saw a noted half-breed who was more than suspected of horse-stealing.

"Slippery Pete," he said. "Sure the misguided vill'in shtole me saddle last winter. Sorra go wid him wheriver he will thravel!"

"I don't think we need make any questions about this yer," said Joe. "Thar ain't either of these dead cusses but what needed skulpin' years ago, and we know that they was friends of this yer Con Thurston. We'll know whar to look."

"I'm with you, Joe," said Mr. Sedley, grating his teeth fiercely. "They've burnt me out of house and home, and

now I think of nothing but revenge. I'll mark down the villains though I die for it."

"And I am with you, heart and soul," said Harry Sanderson, "for when we hunt down Con Thurston and his gang, I believe that we hunt down the men who killed my father."

"Sure it's a free foight!" said Dan, with a laugh, "an' ye'll have to count an Irishman in, becoz a *foight* is his *deloight*."

"Och, be the powers, Dan!" cried his brother; "it's a *poet* ye are. I'd loike foine to have a brush wid them bla'gards, me own silf."

"And we'll hev it," said Joe. "Thar ain't any thing we kin save from the house, is thar, Sam?"

"No," replied Sedley, gazing sadly on the burning dwelling, which was now completely enveloped in flames. "Here, Happy," he cried, turning to the Indian, who was standing near by, with an interested look upon his noble face; "are you going to join us and fight these devils now?"

Happy stooped and laid his finger upon the bosom of Slippery Pete.

"My rifle do dat," he said, quietly. "Happy Bill your frien'."

"That's so," said Joe. "He was the one who gave the alarm and brought us out to help you, and he'll stand by us to the end, Bill will. I know him, clear through."

Happy Bill nodded approvingly, and patted Joe affectionately on the shoulder. "You big, good man," he added. "I fight for you but I no hurt white girl at cabin in woods. She good gal, dat one."

"He means Nettie Forbes," said Harry. "No, my friends; whatever happens, no harm must come to her."

"Hi!" said Happy. "S'pose she no put you in cellar, white man take scalp, eh?"

He made a gesture as if removing the scalp from the head of an enemy, and Harry smiled in spite of himself.

"White gal smart," said Happy, in a meditative tone. Good 'nuff for chief wife, she be; good 'nuff for *you*."

The flush in the face of Harry, showed that the random words of the Indian had touched him.

"Happy," said Joe, "you go and scout. Watch Dick Forbes, and Con Thurston, and Bill Brace, for three days or

until you find out something. Report to me at the big cypress by the cross-roads."

Happy needed no further orders. Drawing in his belt and throwing a hasty glance of farewell upon the party, he started at a long loping trot, taking the direction pursued by the flying robbers. The rest remained to collect any articles which happened to be left out of the house, put them in a heap by themselves and started for Fralick's, meeting men on the road in parties of two, and three, hurrying toward the scene of the fire, armed and ready for battle. They turned back as fast as they met the escaped family, breathing out many border curses, against the outlaws who had burned out Sam Sedley, a great favorite upon the border.

"We'll make this sorry work for them, Sam," said one of the men whom they met. "We'll see if they can ride roughshod over us here in Kansas. It's my opinion, that when we clean out this party, we won't lose so many horses."

"I think you are right, Phillips," said Sedley. "We shall see, though. Scatter when you leave me and call out the boys. You know who to call and who to leave at home. Tell them what is up, and that we camp to-morrow night at the oak opening below the lake, but to keep it quiet, for we want to catch these fellows napping."

The Fralicks put their house at the service of the Sedley family, who were so suddenly left without household goods, or dwelling-place. Nothing in possession of the warm-hearted Irishmen, was too good for the victims of the night raid, and they were ominous in the threats they made against the outlaw band. No one thought of sleep, but sat eagerly conversing and waiting for the morning, when they could commence work.

In the mean time Happy Bill was on the trail of the flying horsemen, who rode with a free rein, until some miles intervened between them and the burning house. Happy knew his powers and that he could tire the swiftest horse that ever put foot to the ground in a long race. He never changed his speed, but his ears were open and he soon heard the distant sound of hoofs. At that he let out a link in his speed and dashed on until the sound was loud enough for him to follow it readily, but not too near for comfort. On the levels he

would lose them; but when a slope was reached, he pursuing the same steady lope, would pull up close to them, and so on, until they turned from the main path and skirted the shore of a little lake in the midst of a silent wood. The path they followed was so intricate that there was scarcely room for a single horse to proceed, and the sound of their bodies brushing through the leaves, was so loud that Happy was able to follow within ten yards. The darkness was intense, and these men must have been well acquainted with the path to pursue it in such utter darkness. Happy was now in his element: scouting was his glory, and he knew that few men could equal him in that subtle art. He could hear the muttered hum of their conversation, and make out but little in the noise occasioned by the closely bending branches. But, he could make out that they were cursing their bad luck in not being able to make an end of Sedley and his family.

They led the Indian over a rough path, but with tireless patience he kept on his way, until the glimmer of lights in front showed that they were approaching some camp. Soon after the party were challenged, and giving some password, went on, leaving Happy Bill at a stand. He must pass that sentinel somehow, and pursue his way, but he was a prudent man although a brave one. Dropping almost to the earth, and bending his tall form, the Indian stole on with noiseless step, until he saw just in front, the dark figure of the sentinel, leaning against a tree, and watching the entrance to the pass. His strong hand rested upon the muzzle of a rifle, his pistols were in his belt, and he looked like a man ready for action at a moment's notice. Happy might have used his rifle, it is true, but that would avail him nothing in the work before him. The man must be conquered *silently* or not at all.

Dropping upon all-fours, he began to creep toward the sentinel, going in such a direction as to keep the tree between them. With wonderful caution, such as only the most finished scout can use, he crept nearer and nearer the object of his enmity, and at last rose slowly, and stood with his back against the tree, while the sentinel remained upon the other side.

Most men in this position would have made a rush upon the enemy; but not so Happy Bill. He waited for a favor-

able moment, and while he waited scarcely seemed to breathe, but his dark eyes were flashing with the ardor of the savage about to engage in battle. He knew by the breathing of the sentinel, that he was drowsy, and waited patiently for him to drop into a doze. He did not wait in vain, for the man slipped down upon the mossy roots of the tree, drew the rifle across his knees, and fell asleep. Happy Bill listened until the long-drawn breath told him that the outlaw guard was really sleeping; then creeping with cat-like caution from his hiding-place, he suddenly threw the sentinel to the earth, pressing his hand upon his mouth as he did so. The man awoke to find the point of a sharp knife pressing against his ribs, his pistols gone from his belt, and some person astride of his body, who evidently had no peaceful intentions regarding him.

"You speak—me kill," hissed Happy. "You keep still!"

It is needless to say that the outlaw obeyed him, and remained quiet under the tiger-like grasp of the Indian, who proceeded to tie the sentinel with his own belt, and to gag him with his own knife-hilt. The man objected to this, but only by struggles. He knew too well that an outcry would cost him his life. Having rendered his prisoner incapable of further injury, Happy bade him good-by, politely, and proceeded on his way, chuckling to himself over his success. A few paces further he entered a narrow pass, into which he had seen the horsemen plunge, and following this for a little distance, it came to an end so abruptly that he found himself almost within the circle of his foes before he could recede. Indeed, another step would have brought him in full view. Retreating into the shelter of the bushes, which shielded the entrance to the pass, he looked upon a wild scene, and one which took him completely by surprise.

A strange sort of village had been built up within the little sheltered valley, which contained perhaps three acres of rich soil with a little stream running through the center. The cabins were of rude construction, most of them being simply "lean-to's," propped against trees or boulders, while only two or three were regularly built up of logs. Even these were old, and had probably been set up long before any of the band had entered the strange haunt. Forty or fifty men were in sight, most of whom had come out of the huts to

meet the approaching party, who hastily dismounted and picketed their horses in the open space. As Happy Bill looked about on the faces of the Night-hawks, he saw men whom he had never for a moment suspected of engaging in this nefarious business—men with whom he had crossed palms in friendship a hundred times.

"Dis bad," he muttered; "Happy sorry for some men here."

But, a moment's reflection convinced him that the men who would mingle with their fellow-men professing friendship while they were only studying means to work them wrong, deserved any fate. The raiding party dismounted, and, as the leader came forward to the light, Happy saw that it was Conrad Thurston!

"Has the Commander come in yet?" he asked, turning to one of the men.

"No, lieutenant. What luck?"

"The devil's own," replied Thurston, angrily. "Four men killed and five wounded, and that cursed squatter escaped without a scratch. We burnt his cabin and should have burnt him in it but that Joe Bagley came up with a party and we had to get out of the way."

"That's mighty bad," said the man, in a tone of deep reflection. "Who were in the party?"

"Do you think I stopped to *count* them?" was the angry reply. "They shot Slippery Pete before we could get away, and the squatter and that devil's kid of his had laid out Tom Ford, Jack Rutt and the 'Scavenger.' I tell you we have had a hard time. Hark!"

A peculiar whistle was heard in the distance, and all stopped and listened intently.

"That's the Commander," said Thurston. "I wonder what he went away for?"

"Been to see that prisoner that Karl keeps back of his hut."

"Oh!" said Conrad, knitting his brows, "that is the idea, eh? I must have a talk with him about that same prisoner."

Happy Bill had also heard the whistle, and deemed that it was wise for him to beat a retreat, for the new-comer might inquire where the sentinel was. Retreating with great cau-

tion, he hurried down the pass at a rapid pace until he had passed the post of the sentinel, and here he buried himself in the bushes and waited. Not long after a man rode up, who stopped near the tree and looked anxiously about him.

"Now, where is that guard?" he muttered. "Curse him, I will have his life if he sleeps. Guard!"

No reply was made and he leaped from his horse and advanced toward the tree. As he did so, Happy saw a dark figure roll out from behind the tree, whom he recognized as the bound sentinel, who used this his only means of locomotion to bring himself into view.

"What is the matter?" hissed the new-comer, drawing a knife. "Why don't you speak, Fenway?"

As he spoke, he bent closer and saw the knife-blade protruding from the mouth of the sentinel. To cut his cords and remove the gag was the work of a moment. The breath came back to the lungs of the man with a great puff, and he broke into a torrent of heartfelt execration. Richard Forbes stopped him.

"That will do, Fenway; now, let me ask you to explain this at once."

"Explain it? Ain't it enough for a man to be trussed up like a beef critter without being asked to *explain* it? He came up behind the tree and jumped me before I knowed any thing about it."

"Who?"

"The Injun."

"What Indian?"

"Him they call Happy Bill—the Sioux. He jumped on me and gagged me as you see."

"Ah!" said Forbes, with a ferocious glance; "so Happy Bill is one of our enemies, is he? Well, we shall now know what to do with the red thief if we catch him. Which way did he go?"

"I couldn't hear; the cuss steps like a cat."

"You shall get even with him some day, and perhaps soon. Get your rifle ready and wait until I get the dog. The cursed Indian shall know that he can't intrude upon us as he chooses."

The dog! When Happy Bill heard that he started and a

great tremor came into his limbs. He had heard of the dog of which the other spoke—a huge blood-hound, a gigantic savage with the force and courage of a lion. He waited to hear no more, but, gathering himself up, he stole away into the woods, and once there commenced to run. He feared each moment to hear the bay of the blood-hound on his track; nor had he long to wait, for a long, deep savage note arose and echoed through the silent woods. Happy Bill ran as he had never run before, for he wished, above all things, to avoid a struggle with the dog, or at least to put so great a distance between himself and his pursuers that they could not overtake him before the struggle was over, for good or evil. It was nearly morning, and for half an hour the Indian dashed on through the intricate paths, making comparatively slow progress, while the bay of the blood-hound came nearer and nearer. He had nearly reached the edge of the woods, when it sounded so close that he threw forward his rifle and looked at the cap. The morning had come, and all depended on his aim. He dashed out into the opening, and whirling quickly, a hundred yards from the woods, took a rest across a low stump and waited.

Not long, for, with a demoniac howl, the mad beast burst out of the thicket, the foam dropping from his red lips, and rushed at the kneeling Indian, who took deliberate aim and pulled the trigger. He had the dog covered and was sure of his aim, but the cap snapped, and he cast down the useless rifle, threw the folds of his blanket about his left arm, drew his knife with the right, and waited the onset. As the dog made his leap, the brave Indian thrust forward his left arm, and the teeth of the brute closed upon it, with terrible force. In spite of the double folds of blanket, the very bones seemed to crack beneath the power of those terrible jaws. Happy struck out and buried his knife to the hilt in the ribs of his gigantic adversary. He recoiled, and shaking his teeth loose from the folds of the cloth, seized the Indian by the shoulder and dragged him down.

In spite of the horrible pain, Happy Bill never lost his head for a moment. His eyes were fixed upon that point behind the shoulder of the dog where he meant to strike the fatal blow. Even while the teeth were meeting in the flesh

he thought of that, and bringing his right arm back, he struck. So fierce was the blow, and so well directed, that the great knife, over eighteen inches in length, was buried to the hilt in the body of the dog. He gave a convulsive leap which lacerated the shoulder of the Indian more than ever, and fell dead upon the earth, the knife buried in his heart.

"White man cuss some more," said Happy, as he rose and staggered on his way. "Happy Bill big warrior now."

CHAPTER X.

THE VIGILANTES.

THE notes of busy preparation were sounding along the border. The men who had sworn to root out crime from Kansas were gathering from far and near at the rendezvous by the lake. They came with rifle, pistol, hatchet and knife, to mete out justice to those who had offended against the unwritten law of Kansas. Men of all nations and all ages—youth, manhood and old age—gathered to do the work of judges. Joe Bagley, by common consent, had been elected captain, and Harry Sanderson was his lieutenant. The reckless *bonhomie* of the young New Yorker pleased the men of the border; *and he could shoot!*—not by any means the smallest recommendation in the eyes of the Kansas men. Very little secrecy was used, although the object of the gathering was only spoken of among themselves. Over two hundred men had come into the camp, when Harry Sanderson called them together and made a short speech.

"It is not likely, men," he said, "that more than a hundred rifles will be needed in this business. That being the case, I have a proposition to make. There are men of family here—men who have wives and children who look to them for bread. Such have no right to risk their lives when there are young hands enough to do the work. I therefore propose that all who have wives and children, or who support aged parents, come out of the ranks."

"No, you don't, Harry!" cried Sam Sedley. "I've got to have a hand in this."

"You can send ycur son, who is as brave a boy as ever stepped. Will you put it to vote?"

"I don't take it kind in you to play this game on me," said Sedley, in an injured tone. "Why, do you think I'm going to be burnt out of my ranch and then keep out of the muss when the boys go after the varmint? No, no, Harry; try something else."

Such a storm of opposition was raised by the older men that Harry, laughingly, gave up the idea. Parties were still coming in, and at last three men appeared, dragging with them the ruffian known as Bill Brace.

"We found this critter streaking it along the south road, Captain Bagley," said one of the captors, "and we thort mebbe you'd like to talk to him."

"Sartin," said Joe Bagley. "Bill, my fine feller, how are ye?"

"None of yer business," was the sulky reply.

"Now, don't rile up that ar' way, Bill," said the captain. "It won't do any good, and it makes *me* feel bad. Thar's a drefful heap of suspicion ag'in' ye, Bill."

"You want to let me go loose, that's what *you* want," said Bill. "I was going for a doctor; I ain't well."

"I can attend to you," said Harry Sanderson. "What is the matter with you?"

"I've got a ball in me," replied Bill, in the same sullen tone, "and I want it took out. But you ain't going to do it, mister."

"Oh yes he *is*, Bill," said Joe Bagley. "I don't want ye to spile yet, because I kin use ye to good advantage in other ways. So, ye see, ef ye've got a ball in ye, I want it to come out."

"S'pose I don't choose to be cut up by any young cutter an' carver that claims the trade, what ar' ye going to do about it?"

"He wants to see my diplomas," said Harry, laughing. "I have them, signed by the board of the Albany Medical College and the London Board. Those two papers are good evidence that I understand my business. Where are you hurt?"

"You shan't touch me, youngster," snarled Bill Brace. "You've got a spite ag'in' me and I ain't safe under your hands."

"Look here, you pitiful coward," said Harry. "If I wanted your life I could take it now, and no one of these men but would say it serve you right. Twice you have attempted robbery and murder, but you have failed. We want information, and we intend to get it out of you. Where were you hit?"

"In the shoulder," growled Bill.

"Take off his shirt, boys," said Joe, cheerfully. "Cut it off if it don't come easy, because the chances are ten cents ag'in' a Boston cracker he don't need any more shirts. How did you get hurt, Pizen?"

"My rifle went off by accident," growled Bill.

"We'll see how much truth thar is in that yarn when we git the bullet," said Joe, in the same easy, good-natured tone. "Thank the pigs, every man hez a mark on his bullet-mold."

"I ain't sartin it was one of my bullets," howled Bill.

"Nothin' sartin in this world," said Joe, "only the chainces in favor of tucking you up to a swinging limb are gitting more fav'able as the hours pass by."

While they were speaking, the men had torn and cut away the shirt from the right shoulder and arm of Bill Brace, leaving the wound exposed. It was a peculiar one, being in the upper part of the shoulder and directed downward, a wound almost impossible for a man to give himself by accident.

"I guess you stood on your head when you shot yerself there," said Joe. "Come; don't be a fool. You couldn't hit yerself in the upper part of the shoulder if you was to try. Now where did ye git that wound?"

"None of yer business," growled Brace.

"All right, git the ball out, Doc. Arter all, that is the best guide."

"It won't be much of a trick to get this bullet," said Harry, laying his finger upon a lump in the muscle of the right shoulder. "Give me that knife out of the case, Jim. No, no, the thin one with the silver handle. That will do."

Stand firm, my man, and in three seconds the ball shall be out."

The knife flashed a moment above the naked back of the captive, and the bullet rolled out into the hand of the surgeon. Bill Brace tried to seize it, but a leveled pistol drove him back.

"No, my lad; we want to find out who owned this bullet. The mark is the letter 'G.' upon a circle," said Harry.

"That is my mark!" cried Sam Sedley. "You devil; you were at my house last night!"

"It's a lie," roared Brace. "Who sez I was?"

"No matter about that. Boys, when the black-hearted scoundrels were in the room below, Jim and I fired through the floor. Jim hit some one, for he yelled out. This chap might have got the bullet that way, fur Jim uses my mark."

"It's a plot to ruin me," hissed Brace. "Curse you, if you kill me I'll come out of my grave to haunt you. I wasn't nigh to Sam Sedley's last night."

"Perhaps you deny having chased me in the early part of the night?" said Harry Sanderson.

"No I don't," said Brace. "You had insulted me, and I wanted satisfaction."

"How did I insult you?"

"Didn't you draw iron on me when I wasn't fixed, and degrade me before my friend? Yes. I own I wanted to git even with this young feller, but I don't know any thing ag'inst that."

"Git a rope, boys," said Joe Bagley. "I don't reckon we'd better waste time with this critter, 'cause his ekal for lying don't dwell in Kansas. Sech being the case, we'll hang him a little for his healthy, and plant him like a man arter it. Why don't some on you bring a lariat?"

"He ain't tried yet, captain," said one of the men.

"Tried! What d'ye want to try him for? Ain't he guilty? Didn't Harry see the cuss racing down arter him, pistol in hand? And ain't we morilly sartin he was at Sedley's last night?"

"He ought to have a trial."

"Trial! *give* him a trial; I'll be president ov the court-martial. But he's got to be hung for his own good."

"There's a judge for you," said Bill—"sentences a man fust and tries him arterwards. I've got a right good chaine of my life among you."

"I reckon it's only a waste of time, boys," said Joe, quietly. "Why don't you bring that lariat, some of you? And while that's a-doing, we may as well take a vote. What d'ye say, boys; does this critter deserve hanging or does he not? As many as think he duz, hold up the right hand."

Every hand was lifted.

"As many as think he *don't*, up with the left."

Not a hand was raised.

"That lets you out you know, you carrot-headed skunk of misery," said Joe. "But, we don't hanker arter your death so much that we won't let ye go cl'ar if you'll tell us whar yer friends make the'r camp. They've got a camp summers, and I'm jubous they've got a right smart heap of our hosses thar."

"You just wait until I tell you any thing," was the sullen reply.

"All hunky, my boy," replied Joe. "It's your own meat, but I think as how you ar' cutting it too fat. Now, look yer: it's the sentence of the court that you be strung up by the neck until you ar' dead. *Why* don't you bring that lariat?"

"You wouldn't hang me?" cried the captive, turning pale.

"I rayther guess yes, my friend. Throw the eend of the rope over that limb, boys; I reckon it'll hold the cuss. Go under the tree, Bill; you've got ter pass in your checks."

"But this is murder," gasped Brace. "You don't give a man no sight fur his life."

"No more we don't intend to, Bill; you don't deserve it. And yet, it don't seem right fur a Christian man to string up a heathen like you. I wish an Injun would happen along."

He had scarcely spoken, when Happy Bill dashed into the camp; the calico of his hunting-shirt, soaking with blood, and his left arm hanging useless by his side.

"Hooray!" cried Joe; "here he is, the red cuss. Glad to see ye, Happy, by the bokies. Any luck?"

Happy nodded, and looked significantly at Bill Brace.

"Oh, you don't want to talk afore him, eh? It don't

make much differ, as we are going to string him up. What is the matter with yer shoulder?"

"Big dog, bite," replied Happy. "Him nebber bite any more; ugh!"

"See here, Happy Bill," said Brace, "can't you say a word for a feller? These yer men want my life—they do, and I don't want to die."

"You make Happy Bill drink fire-water, eh!" said the Indian. "Dog; you die *like* dog, and you ought to die!"

"That ain't fair, Happy," howled Bill. "Let's fight it out like men, on a dead level, and no fooling. I'll fight you with the gaffs, or on my own heels; I'll fight you any way."

Happy pointed to his wounded shoulder, with his unwounded hand.

"Yes, I see that," said Bill, "but I'll tie one hand behind me, and fight you that way."

"Quit talking," said Joe. "Once fur all, will ye tell us whar yer friends are camped?"

"I kain't do that" replied Bill. "I've got a mortal oath to break, and I don't dare do it."

"Then go under the tree," said Joe. "We ain't got no more time to waste."

Bill advanced, as if to obey the order, but turning suddenly, he placed one hand upon the back of a horse, and leaped nimbly into the midst of the corral. For a moment, they lost sight of him, in the confused mass of horses, but when he appeared again, he had cleared the corral, and plunged into the bushes on the other side. Half a dozen swift runners darted after him, but the fleet-footed villain had already buried himself in the dense thicket, and they could only follow his trail. He made for the swamp, which bordered the shore of the lake, satisfied that if he once gained its shelter, he would be able to elude his tireless pursuers, whom he could hear already on the trail, spreading out to the right and left as they came, in order to surround him. He reached the swamp in advance of them, and broke through the cover, leaping from tussock to tussock, hearing the sounds of pursuit gradually dying away in the distance. He began to hope more and more, when there started up from the swamp an enemy, t the sight of whom, his blood ran cold.

It was the maniac prisoner of Dick Forbes. His figure seemed preternaturally tall, as he started up from the cover, his white hair and beard floating out on the breeze, and a heavy ax gleaming in his right hand. The expression of his countenance was terrible, for he recognized in Bill Brace one of his worst persecutors and enemies. Brace recoiled with a shriek of terror, as the white specter darted at him.

"Aha!" he screamed. "Here is one more. Now, dog, I will drink your blood."

Brace darted away at his utmost speed, but, fast as he fled, the strange being in pursuit rapidly closed on him, and he saw at once the uselessness of flight. Turning suddenly, he darted under the ax, so quickly, that the blow as it fell did not harm him, and he grasped the maniac about the body. To his horror, the gray-beard dropped his ax, and clutched him with a muscular force of which he had not dreamed him capable.

"Hi, villain!" he hissed, "give me back my son; give me back the life I have lost, and tell me why I am here!"

"Down!" shrieked Brace, "or beware the fire."

This, which in his prison would have frightened the maniac, had no effect upon him now.

"There is no fire here," he hissed. "I will give you water to drink—water and blood. Down, you dog! Go where I have sent Karl."

A fearful struggle now began, the strong man fighting for his life, as only a desperate man can. Up and down the little patch of level ground—stumbling over broken limbs, and splashing through stagnant pools, locked in a death-grapple, they went. But, the strength of the madman seemed to augment as the struggle continued, while Brace felt himself growing weaker. The fierce laughter of the old man never ceased, even while he fought, and Brace began to cry for help.

"This way!" he screamed, as he heard voices and the splashing of water, as the pursuers came on. "Help! He will murder me in cold blood!"

The maniac shifted his grasp, and fastened his long claw-like talons in the throat of Bill Brace. The ruffian felt that his last hour had come, and the demoniac laughter of his ad-

versary, drove him wild. To struggle, was useless now, and as life and sense faded away, the wild laughter rung out through the swamp.

"Ha ! ha ! ha ! Come and help him, quick ! He is choking ! He cannot cry for help, the black dog ! So Karl cried out, when my fingers fastened on his throat."

The pursuers were now close at hand, but his work was done. The limbs of the poor wretch no longer moved, and his protruding tongue seemed to mock his slayer. Harry Sanderson and Joe Bagley struggled out of the swamp just as the madman leaped away in the bushes, making the forest ring with his cries. But, he had done his work, and Bill Brace was dead.

CHAPTER XI

KARL PEUGH'S DOOM.

THE madman had disappeared so suddenly that they had only a fleeting glimpse of him as he plunged headlong into the thicket, and they stood above the blackened corpse of the outlaw, looking at it in wonder and dismay.

"He's pegged out—that's what's the matter with him," said Joe ; "but, who done the trick ? That's what I want to know."

"It looked like a very old man," replied Harry ; "but, he must have been wonderfully strong to kill this desperado in a hand-to-hand struggle. Oh, here is an ax."

"It has not been used, though," said Joe, taking it up and looking at the bright blade.

"There is something here which I am far from understanding, Joe."

"It gets me, too," was the answer. "Howsoever, he has saved us a job, and all we've got to do is to berry the critter where he lies."

He caught up the ax and began to scoop up the earth on the edge of the swamp island. Harry assisted him in the

work, and in ten minutes they had dug a shallow grave, in which they laid the slain man to rest. His wild life was at an end forever. Just as they commenced to throw the earth upon the body, Happy Bill appeared.

"Somebody kill him, eh?" he said.

"Yes, Bill; but we don't know who it was. An old man with gray hair and beard. Have you ever seen him?"

Happy Bill shook his head and looked longingly at the scalp of Bill Brace. Joe understood the look at once.

"No, no, Happy; play a square game, whatever you do. If you'd 'a' killed him, his ha'r belonged to you, but seein' some one else done the job, it stands to reason you hain't got no right to the ha'r."

Happy said nothing, but began to throw the loose earth over the body with his foot. It took but a little time to fill the grave, and they trampled it down hard upon him. There was little or no compassion for the doomed man in the breast of either of the men who buried him, for they knew him to be a ruthless villain, to whom murder was mere sport, and that he richly deserved his fate.

"That job is done. Let us go back to camp," said Joe.

They turned and left the island, whistling, as they passed along, to call in the men who were still on the pursuit. In a short time the whole party were assembled, and Joe recounted the manner of the escaped prisoner's death. The men looked blank, for many of them were superstitious, and they could not understand who this strange being could be, as none of them had ever met him.

"It's all right, boys," sagely concluded Joe. "He ain't arter us, and if he always shows as good jedgment about the men he kills as he has done this time, we won't quarrel. Now then—business."

Let us return to the camp of the outlaws after Dick Forbes had let the bloodhound loose upon the track of the Indian. They had found the dog where he had been left by Happy Bill, with the blood from his heart dyeing the grass upon which he lay, and many were the maledictions showered on the Sioux by the outlaws. Forbes heard the report of Thur-

ston with many misgivings, and remained for some moments in deep thought.

"We must mark out a new trail, Con," he said, at last. "This country will be too hot to hold us, and the sooner we are out of it the better. I wish we had these horses off our hands, and we would scatter this very day."

"Do you think the Vigilantes will come out, commander?"

"I know it. Sam Sedley is a king-pin among them, and we may expect them on our haunches any day. By the way, Con, look at this."

He showed the young man the piece of paper upon which the madman had traced the signature, the night before.

"Who wrote that?" cried Thurston, starting back.

"The man himself; you see that he has not forgotten how to write. Now, if we could get his signature to certain papers, which I have already made out, we could enrich ourselves without trouble—that is, you and I. The rest may take care of themselves."

Thurston laughed, with a keen look at the men lounging around.

"But, suppose he won't sign?"

"I think we can persuade him to do it," was the reply, with a look of dark meaning. "After he has signed, we have only to lock the cavern door upon him, and famine will do the rest."

"I would give five years of my life if we could lock Sanderson in with him," muttered Thurston.

"It would be better, perhaps," replied Forbes. "Still we must risk nothing, and if the madman signs these papers we will leave our worthy friends to take care of themselves, and strike out for a civilized life. In Europe we can make up for the troubles we have had in this cursed wilderness."

"Yet we can't complain, after all," responded Thurston. "There is nearly a hundred thousand dollars deposited in the name of Richard Forbes and Conrad Thurston, in the Planters' Bank."

"It is not enough," said Forbes, with a greedy look. "I must have more, for in Europe we shall be princes or nothing. Come—we will take our horses and ride down to the cave-prison, and see what we can find there."

The camp was left in charge of Ben Riker, a desperado who had been absent for some weeks and had just come in. He had strict injunctions to suffer no straggling, and to keep a close watch. This attended to, the leaders rode away by the most secluded paths until they arrived at the solitary cabin which Forbes had visited the night before. Thurston knocked loudly for admittance.

"It is no use," said Forbes, laughing. "I brought Karl a bottle of whisky, and he is probably as drunk as a lord by this time. Let us go in."

They drove in their picket-pins and opened the door. Karl was nowhere in sight.

"I told you so," said Forbes. "The fellow is full, and is probably in his bunk."

"It is a strange thing that you trust him in so important a matter," remarked Thurston. "He might allow the prisoner to escape."

"I have no fear of that," replied Forbes; "the madman is chained to the wall, and even if Karl opened the door he could not get away. Look in the bunk and see if the Prussian is there."

Thurston pushed aside a ragged curtain and looked into the bunk, but found it empty.

"This is singular," muttered Forbes. "I suppose he has wandered off into the woods. We will take care of ourselves, and perhaps it is as well that he should not suspect what we are doing."

He opened a pocket in the lining of his blouse and took out two or three legal-looking documents, and something which looked like a bank-book.

"This paper," he said, touching one of them, "orders the Planter's Bank to deliver without question the package left by our prisoner, two years ago. In that package are jewels to the value of two hundred thousand dollars."

"Whew!" said Thurston.

"Understand me; these jewels by right belong to me, but they shall be divided with the rest. The bank-book is good for one hundred thousand dollars, after being signed by our prisoner, and the remaining paper is a deed of his property in New York. I am afraid to say how much that is worth."

"We shall be kings instead of princes," said Thurston, drawing a deep breath. "Let us get to work at once."

"Fill that brazier with charcoal and light it," ordered Forbes. "Where are those irons? We may have to *persuade* him to sign these papers."

"And if he refuses?"

"I will burn his heart out!" replied Forbes, fiercely. "But, he dare not refuse, for you know how he fears the fire."

Thurston got out a small iron brazier from a closet, filled it with charcoal and lighted it. From the same corner he brought out some small iron rods, which he laid upon the floor beside the brazier. They waited for some moments until the coal was glowing in the brazier, when the young man took it up, and gave a signal to Forbes to lead the way. He took the iron rods and opened the door which led into the cavern, when he gave a cry of astonishment.

"The door is open, Con," he cried. "What does this mean?"

"Go on," replied Thurston, hurriedly. "We will make Master Karl sweat for this."

Forbes strode on rapidly and reached the inner door of the cavern, which stood partly open. He pushed at it, but something heavy kept it in its place. Giving a harder push, he stumbled into the room, and fell over some obstruction which blocked up the doorway, uttering a cry of horror as he did so. Thurston followed him in and the brazier nearly dropped from his hand.

Karl lay dead upon the floor, his skull crushed like an egg-shell. In one hand he held a long whip with braided tails, similar to those used on board a man-of-war, and known as the "cat," and in the other a bottle, half empty. There was an expression of fearful agony upon his bruised and bleeding face, as if he had not died without a struggle. A large hammer lay upon the floor near the wall beside the broken chain which had so long bound the maniac prisoner, who was nowhere to be seen.

"No wonder the poor fellow did not answer our call. How did this happen? and what are we to do now?" Forbes evidently was disconcerted.

"You may thank your bottle of whisky for this," said Thurston. "I know the Prussian well, and can see how he brought this fate upon himself. He made himself drunk after you left him, and thought to relieve the monotony of his life by abusing the maniac. Being intoxicated, he ventured incautiously within reach of his arm, and you see the result."

"But the hammer," said Forbes; "how did he get that?" Thurston shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can tell what freak was in Karl's head when he came here? The fool did not know what he was doing, and received his just deserts. But, we must not delay, for the maniac must be captured at all hazards."

"You are right, Con. Take your horse and ride hard for the camp. Pick out five or six of the best trailers and bring them here and it will go hard if we do not hunt the fox to earth."

Thurston hurried out of the dismal place, closely followed by Forbes, who stood in the door looking after him as he rode away. The man was deeply troubled by the course which events had taken within the past few days. The maniac, if he recovered his senses, as he might do when free, knew enough to hang him. Besides, they were playing for a great stake which they could only hope to win by getting his signature to the papers which had been prepared. He was ill at ease, too, as he thought of the ghastly body lying in its blood in the cave prison. What if the madman were to come upon him suddenly? What could he do to oppose his maniacal strength?

"Ten thousand curses on the head of the Prussian. He has ruined the work of a lifetime."

He closed the door carefully and re-entered the cabin. Sitting down at the table he buried his face in his hands, in deep thought.

"I might have been a happy man if I could have been an honest one," he muttered. "But love and avarice, those twin monsters, led me astray. My poor Annette! what will become of you if I fail in this? I must give her to Thurston, yet I fear that he will break her heart, for he is more wicked than I am."

He did not know that the door had been pushed open, nor hear the stealthy, sliding step upon the floor. Suddenly, without warning, two bony hands clutched him by the throat and dragged him backward upon the floor, and in an agony of terror impossible to describe, he saw the terrible face of the maniac close to his!

"Ha! ha! ha!" the frenzied creature screamed; "who is it that triumphs now?"

For a single moment only Forbes lay supine under the tiger grasp of the maniac, and then he made a frantic effort to free himself. Failing in that, he thrust his hand into the bosom of his hunting-coat in search of a pistol, but the maniac clutched him by the wrist with a force under which the very bones seemed to give way.

"No, no!" he hissed; "lie still or I will beat out your brains against the floor, or strangle you as I strangled Brace just now."

"Bill Brace?" gasped Forbes.

"Yes, Bill Brace. Call him and see if he will come to you. It isn't a mile away where I left him with his face black and his tongue out. Ha! ha! ha! How he prayed for life.

"You dog!" cried Forbes! "Beware the fire. I will burn you to a blister."

"Ha! ha! ha! How can you burn me when I hold you down? Karl came to burn me. He heated the hammer hot, but I was ready for him. How he yelled, when my hands fastened on him and dragged him down upon the stones. Ha! ha! ha! I am free—*free!*"

Even as he spoke, he released one hand and caught up a lariat, which he had brought from the outside, stolen probably from his prisoner's own horse. He had cut it into three pieces, and with one of these, proceeded to bind his prisoner's hands. His feet were served in the same manner, and he lay helpless. At this moment, his eyes rested upon the burning brazier, which Thurston had brought from the cave, and the iron rods.

"Ha! ha! ha! I'll burn *you* with the irons and then lock you in the cave. I will be revenged."

Forbes uttered a shriek of agony, for he felt that his last hour had come.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH PASS.

CONRAD THURSTON rode hard, for he knew well how much depended upon his speed, yet it was nearly noon when he reached the camp of the outlaws, and began to select the men he needed for the work before him. He had hardly completed the task, and the men were saddling their horses, when Annette, mounted upon a fiery mustang colt, rode into the camp.

"Where is father?" she cried in an excited tone. "I must see him."

"He is at Karl's house," replied Thurston. "What do you want of him?"

"You are in danger here," she replied. "The Vigilantes are up and it will need hard riding to save your necks."

"Where are they?" he cried.

"That I do not know. Happy Bill came to me this morning and told me to warn my father of the danger, and to warn no one else. I could not do that, and I came to you. Haste! There is not a moment to lose, for already they may be upon the march."

"Curse them, we will make it a hot road for them. Who is their leader?"

"Joe Bagley and—"

"You need not tell me the name. It is that cursed Sanderson whom I hate, now, more than ever. Ten thousand demons! to get even with him I would almost lose you."

"You have a cruel nature," she said. "Why need there be any fighting? You have time to scatter and nearly all will escape."

"We should get picked up, man by man, and strung up to the nearest tree. No; we must hang together or we shall hang separately. So we will fight it out where we stand."

At this moment a sharp alarm-whistle was heard from one of the guards.

"Masks!" cried Thurston. "Get your rifles, boys, and stand ready. We are in a trap, but we can make it a bloody trap to them, if we are brave men."

The outlaws caught up their weapons, ran out into the pass, and silently ranged themselves in convenient covers. Each man wore his mask, for some might escape and they did not care to have their faces known to the Vigilantes.

The battle was begun by the defenders, who attempted to pick off the scouts as they advanced. But, the movements of these men were well covered by others, who lay concealed and fired whenever one of the outlaws showed enough of his person for a mark. Consequently a careful aim was out of the question, and although some wounds were given, not a man had been killed, when Joe Bagley succeeded in forcing sixty of his best men within forty yards of the mouth of the pass.

Suddenly a second party, nearly as strong as the first, made a forward movement and in so doing drew the fire of many of the outlaws, who were taken by surprise and fired before Thurston could forbid them.

This was the moment for Joe Bagley. Half the opposing rifles were empty. His signal yell rung through the woods, and, as the Vigilantes heard it, sixty men slipped out of the cover and made a dash at the mouth of the pass. They received a weak volley, which dropped two or three of their number, but did not stop them, and they were in the pass before the outlaws could reload. Up started the horse-thieves, knife and hatchet ready, and a bloody battle began in the narrow way.

Harry Sanderson would have singled out Thurston in the first rush, but Joe Bagley was before him. As he advanced Thurston discharged a pistol and Bagley threw up his hands and fell upon his back. Thurston laughed bitterly and was drawing another pistol, when there started up before him a being before whom he recoiled as from a pestilence! This was the maniac prisoner who had, in some way, managed to arrive upon the ground in time to take part in the struggle. His weapon was a huge club, which he whirled about his head with a furious look.

"Ha!" he screamed. "You are the next."

Thurston darted back, for, brave as he was, the encounter

took him so completely by surprise that for a moment he was a coward. The sudden movement brought two of the outlaws between the maniac and the object of his hate. He uttered a wild scream of rage, and lifting the heavy club, dashed the two outlaws senseless to the earth and rushed on in pursuit of Thurston.

The second detachment poured in to the assistance of the first, and a tempest of steel encircled the doomed Night-hawks. Man by man they fell, fighting as only men can who have nothing to hope for in this life. Twenty minutes from the first assault, the Vigilantes stood triumphant in the pass, among the bloody bodies of both friend and foe.

"Let us look for poor Joe," said Sedley. "He went down in the first rush."

They turned over the bodies of the slain until they came to that of Joe Bagley. He was lying where he fell, with the blood running from a wound apparently in the brain. Sedley poured some whisky from his flask and put it to his nostrils, saying:

"He is gone, poor fellow. I would sooner have lost my right hand."

At this moment, a strong hand seized the bottle which he held, and the dead man sat up, nodding to his friends.

"Here's lookin' at ye," he said, taking a hearty pull. "'Bliged t' ye, Sam; I wanted a drink powerful bad."

The Vigilantes burst into a loud laugh, as they saw the supposed dead man rise. It was an example of the ruling passion, strong in death. The bullet had passed along the scalp and stunned the old trapper, without inflicting any permanent injury. He rose, staggering a little, took another drink, and announced himself ready for action, and was grievously disappointed to hear that the battle was done.

Few prisoners had been taken, for the Night-hawks fought so desperately, as to render that impossible. But, they looked in vain for Thurston or Forbes, whom they expected to find among the dead.

At this moment, one of the outlaws, who was badly wounded, raised himself upon his elbow.

"Thurston deserted us," he hissed. "I saw him run like a coward, when he saw that he was done for. Look out for

him—he's got Nettie. Look in Karl Peugh's cabin ; Joe knows the place," and he fainted from loss of blood.

"Here, boys," said Joe, quickly. "Lift up this young feller, and take good care on him. He ain't to be hurt, leastways till we come back. Go through the camp while we are gone, pick up all the horses, bury the dead, and camp down till we come ag'in."

He called out Sam Sedley, Happy, Jim, the two Fralicks, and, with Harry, mounted and rode away through the woods.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MANIAC'S VENGEANCE.

ANNETTE had remained in the outlaw camp, in charge of the two men appointed by Thurston for that purpose, listening eagerly to the sounds of battle, which came to them from the pass. As the sound came nearer, the men began to show symptoms of alarm, for they could tell that their friends were being driven back, and, when the crack of the rifles ceased, and the rattle of knives and hatchets alone could be heard, they prepared to seek safety in flight. It was at this moment, that Thurston burst out of the pass, bare-headed, with blood upon his face, and a pistol in his hand.

"Mount, and away !" he cried, hoarsely. "The band are doomed beyond a doubt. You—Bascom, bring Miss Annette's horse."

The man obeyed, and Thurston assisted Annette to mount. In the mean time, the other man had brought his own horse and that of Thurston, and the party rode away by the shore of the little lake, seeking an outlet which was well known to them. An hour's ride brought them out of the woods, and to a place where several paths diverged.

"Here we part, boys," said Thurston. "It is useless for us to try to keep together, after what has happened. We shall be pursued in the morning, and all of us will not escape, so it is better to give them all the trails we can."

The men struck into one of the side paths, and disappeared. During this time, Conrad had never removed his hand from the bridle of Annette's horse.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"To Karl Peugh's cabin," was the reply.

"Why do you take me there?"

"Your father is waiting for us; and from there we will continue our flight."

"I want to go home," she said, coolly.

"You are not going there," he replied. "I tell you again that your father is at Peugh's cabin. Let us suppose that you go home and that you could find your way through the woods, you would sacrifice your father by doing so."

"How?" she cried, starting.

"You know that he loves you, and would never leave Kansas without you. Neither would I, for that matter, but my wishes are nothing here. He would go to his house after you though they hung him the next hour."

"He would indeed," said Annette, trembling. "I will go to Peugh's with you, but upon one condition. You are to give me your pistols, and ride in front all the way."

"I agree," he cried, eagerly. "Will you promise to come, upon those conditions?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me."

He gave up the pistols and took the lead, riding rapidly along the sheltered path he had chosen. Not a word was spoken by either, but she followed him through the darkness unhesitatingly, until, descending a little slope, they came suddenly upon Peugh's cabin. A deathlike stillness reigned about the place, and by an involuntary movement Conrad checked his horse and looked at it. There was something in that deathly quiet which in spite of his strong manhood, sent a chill through his frame.

"It is a horrible place," he thought. "I wish that Forbes would come out."

But, Forbes did not appear, and the lieutenant descended and opened the cabin door.

"Stay here a moment until I look inside," he said, to Annette, who had not dismounted.

He entered the passage, when a groan saluted him, and he hurried on. Pushing open the last door, he entered the dungeon, and saw Forbes, bound hand and foot, and with his garments half burned from his person, lying upon the stone floor. He uttered a hollow groan as he saw Thurston. The young man drew his knife and cut the cords.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Who has done this?"

"The maniac," whispered Forbes, in a voice of agony. "He came upon me suddenly, bound me as you see, and burned me with the iron rods until I fainted. Oh! don't touch me for I am as a burning coal."

"All the fiends seem to conspire against us during the last week," said Thurston. "Our sins are finding us out, it would seem."

"Don't preach," cried Forbes, pettishly; "have you brought the men?"

"No," replied Thurston. "The Night-hawks are scattered, killed or taken, and we alone are safe."

"Where is Annette?" hissed Forbes, starting up on his elbow in spite of the pain. "If you have not saved her I will have your life."

"Annette is with me," replied Thurston. "Where is Peugh's body?"

"The madman carried it away with him, and soon after I heard him ride off, on my horse. See if you can lift me and carry me into the cabin."

By a great effort, which drew low ejaculations of pain from the scorched and bruised man, he was carried out and laid upon Peugh's bed.

"Call in Annette," whispered the sufferer.

Thurston stepped to the door and called to Annette that her father was within, but hurt. She would not believe him until she heard the feeble voice of Forbes calling her, when she sprung from the saddle and ran in, only to see him extended helpless upon the low bed.

"Oh, father, father!" she sobbed, "has all your evil life led only to this?"

"There, girl," he said, harshly, "I am hardly in a condition to hear you patiently. If you have nothing better to say than that, you had better get your horse and ride home."

She said no more, but set to work with woman's quickness in preparing a soothing lotion for his burned back. Her soft hand applied it in a way which did not pain him, while Thurston sat near, rising only to hand her what she wanted, and wondering whether it would be better or worse for him if Forbes should die.

"Listen, my girl," the wounded man said, when he was more at ease, "I have but a little while to live. In the struggle with this maniac I have injured myself internally, and in a few hours at most I shall have seen the last of earth."

"Don't say that, father," she pleaded. "You will live; you will lead a new life and be happy."

"Bah! I can not live a new life if I would. No, the sands of my life are running very low, and in a few hours, all that is mortal of Richard Forbes will be ready for the grave. Hush! I thought I heard a noise!"

"It was fancy," said Annette. "You heard nothing."

"You must keep your promise to Thurston, my darling. I would have left you in better care if I could, but at least he loves you, and there is money enough for you to live rich and contented if you will. I wrought much wickedness for your sake, Annette. Ha! *He* is here!"

As he spoke there came a sudden rush of feet, and there darted in at the half-open door the gigantic figure of the Maniac Avenger! His hand still held the heavy club with which he had beaten down the outlaws, and which was still stained with blood.

"Stop!" he cried, as Thurston started up with a knife in his hand. "If you lift the knife I will kill you. Down, you dog! Do *you* dare to rise against me?"

Thurston fell back upon the stool, panting like a wild beast brought to bay.

"You escaped me in the fight," the wildman hissed, "and your horses were swift, but I know how to ride too. I am here for vengeance. Ah! who is that? Do angels come down and watch over the death of a fiend?"

His eyes rested upon the face of Annette, and the fierce light died out of them in a moment.

"Little angel—little angel," he whispered, "have you come back to earth to teach me goodness?"

"Give me a pistol," whispered Thurston, hoarsely. "This demon will kill us all. Girl—do you not see that he is a madman?"

"Don't fear me, little angel," said the madman, whose fierce countenance had become suddenly changed to childlike sweetness. "You have never wronged me—never. Three men did it all—Bill Brace, he is dead; Dick Forbes, who lies yonder; and this man. Ha! I must kill him now."

"Give me a pistol, quick!" cried Conrad. But she stepped between him and the madman and lifted her hand. The raised club dropped suddenly, and his face again took on that calm, peaceful expression.

"Thou shalt do no murder!" she cried, in her sweet, low voice.

He pressed his hand upon his forehead, and a puzzled expression came over his face. "Who spoke then," he murmured. "When have I heard that said? It was before my brain went wild, I think."

Conrad Thurston, whose heart was all evil, took advantage of the pause. His knife was in his hand, and making a single cat-like leap he struck at the bosom of the maniac, who threw up his arm to ward off the blow. The keen blade passed between the bones of the forearm and here clung, and stepping back a pace the maniac raised his club in one hand and struck. Annette uttered a wild scream of agony, and Conrad relinquished his hold of the knife and fell back dead, before he struck the floor. A moment after the rush of feet was heard, and Harry Sanderson, followed by his friends, darted into the cabin. They took in the tableau at a glance, and with a wild shout Harry ran in between the maniac and Annette.

"Stand off, old man!" he cried, "or I shall do you a mischief! Off, I say!"

The club dropped from the hand of the madman, and he gazed at the young adventurer in a wild, fixed way.

"Who speaks?" he murmured. "It is a voice from the other world. Where am I? My brain is all on fire, and it is coming back to me."

"I don't know what to think," said Harry, in an excited tone. "Would you like to hear my name?"

"Yes, yes; speak quickly."

"Harry Sanderson."

He uttered a strange, hoarse cry, and made a single step toward Harry. The sound of that forgotten name had brought back the memory of the demented man, and crying: "Harry—my boy—my Harry!" he fell to the hard floor of the cabin, the blood from his wounded arm soaking into the floor and dyeing his white hair and beard.

Son and father were united after their long separation.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

A WEEK later and Colonel Sanderson, whose life hung upon a thread, was convalescent, but Forbes was growing weaker. The two sick men sat opposite each other, propped up by pillows, regarding each other strangely. The colonel was no longer a maniac, for the shock of his son's coming had given him back the reason which a shock had taken away. Mrs. Sedley had also come to the cabin, and for the present the Sedley family made their quarters at the place. Annette would not desert her father, and it almost required force to make her leave him long enough to take rest.

"I am going to make a confession," said Forbes, one day, "and I want you all to hear me. My name is Hugh Graham, and I was for years the trusted agent of Colonel Sanderson. In an evil hour I robbed him of money and bonds to the extent of one hundred thousand dollars and fled for Kansas. That was ten years ago, and before I reached St. Jo I was myself robbed of nearly all I had in the world. I set up business in Leavenworth with what remained, but I could not make friends and I failed again. My wife died, soon after, and collecting what money I could, I came to this place. My misfortunes, for such I regard them, had made me a hater of mankind, and I determined to prey upon them. With this design I formed the band known as the "Night-hawks."

Our business was robbery and horse-stealing, and our men were scattered over many miles of territory. All that they gained went into a common fund. Our laws were strict, and the man who broke them was doomed. Four years ago, while at Leavenworth, I met a man who had known me as the agent of Colonel Sanderson, and this man wrote to him where I was to be found."

The colonel nodded.

"He came by mere accident to my cabin in the woods, one day, at sunset. I professed repentance and promised to make restitution. That night he was seized by some of my men and carried to this place, where he has been kept a prisoner until his escape upon the night when Sedley's house was burned. I used him like a dog, and his revenge was just. I can say no more."

After a moment's pause, he continued:

"Before I die, I would do the little justice in my power. In the Planters' Bank is money to the amount of a hundred thousand dollars. It is the aggregate earnings of the Night-hawks for the year now passing, and which is not yet divided. The Night-hawks are gone, and the money is yours by right. In this memorandum-book you will find a record of the horses and other property stolen in this section, and disposed of, with the amount received for each. You can make restitution, if you will, but I would be glad if enough could be kept to place my poor child above want."

"The money must be returned," said Annette; "I would not touch a penny to save myself from starvation."

"Noble girl!" cried Colonel Sanderson. "Look you, Graham, I will take charge of this good girl. I *know* that she is good—it is written on her face. And I give you my solemn promise that she shall be treated in all respects as my own child."

"I am satisfied," murmured Graham. "Kiss me, Nettie. I have been a bad father to you all these years, but I love you—my daughter—I love you!"

She stooped and kissed him, and turning on his pillow with a gasping sigh, he yielded up his life. The only sound heard was the low sobbing of Annette, as she bent above the lifeless clay.

Few words are needed now. The unhappy man was buried not far from the cabin, with a rough stone at the head of his grave, marked only with his name and age. Colonel Sanderson recovered and kept his word faithfully to the dead. Restitution was made as far as possible, but some of the claimants were dead, or had removed from the country, and quite a large sum remained from the bank deposit. Out of this amount the buildings of the Sedleys were restored, and they were made comfortable. Happy was given money enough to make him a rich man, in his simple tribe, and he returned, and in time was restored to his ancient honors, as he proved himself a reformed man. Colonel Sanderson, taking Annette to St. Louis, put her in a school, where she remained three years, after which she went to New York to reign over Colonel Sanderson's home. Three months after, she and Harry were married.

Four years after the destruction of the Night-hawks, there was a happy party at Sedley's, at the raising of a great barn, for Sedley had grown rich in those years. There was Happy Bill, who had stopped for a few days on his march to attend a meeting of Indian "Masons" in Colorado. There were Joe Bagley, a little more grizzled, but the same hardy old man as of yore; Jim Sedley, now a fine young man, desperately in love with pretty Rosa Dean, the daughter of a settler; Sam Sedley, grown very corpulent and a justice of the peace; the brothers Fralick, the life of the whole party.

The barn had been raised, and Jim Sedley was standing on the upper plate, when he saw a lady and two gentlemen riding up the road at a smart pace. He looked hard at them for a moment; they came nearer, and then he uttered a panther-like yell and came down from the plate like a cat, much to the horror of Rosa Dean.

"Hurrah!" he yelled. "Come along, Joe; it's Harry Sanderson and his father!"

The party had scarcely reached the big gate when they were met by their old friends, whose greeting was warm enough to make them feel at home. And what a cheer went up when they recognized in Harry's wife the Nettie Forbes they used to know!

"This is the place for me," said Harry. "Joe, you old villain, give me your hand again. We have come to end our days in Kansas!"

They are in that grand border State now, happy and beloved, amid the friends whom they made in the days of the Border Nighthawks. Here we leave them to the happiness they richly deserve.

THE END.

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